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ABSTRACT

Issues related to school instruction in students' heritage or ancestral language are discussed, particularly in regard to dialect-speaking children or children with some degree of competence in the language. The first chapter considers similarities and differences between second language instruction and heritage language education. The findings on ancestral language maintenance in immigrant children are also discussed for the benefit of teachers. Chapter 2 looks closely at the crucial question of the difference between the standard target language and the variant forms, known by the students (i.e., dialects or regionally-determined variants), as it relates to classroom instruction. The third chapter draws a psychological profile of the heritage language learner, focusing on existing linguistic knowledge and its pedagogical implications. Chapter 4 looks at the literature on errors in language learning and relates it to heritage language teaching. The final chapter addresses practical instructional issues such as curriculum design and content. (MSE)

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Teaching a Heritage Language to Dialect-Speaking Students

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Marcel Danesi

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Teaching a Heritage Language to Dialect-Speaking Students

Marcel Danesi

Language and Literacy Series

General Editors

Jim Cummins
Sharon Lapkin
Merrill Swain

OISE Press

The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Centro Canadese Scuola e Cultura Italiana

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Contents

Foreword / v

Preface / vii

1 **Learning Ancestral Languages in School: What Does the Research Say?** / 1
Some Terms / 1
Ancestral Language Programs / 2
Some Research Findings / 3
Past, Present, and Future / 5
Suggestions for Further Reading / 6

2 **Dialect and Language** / 7
What Is a Dialect? / 7
The Ancestral Language as a Community Language / 10
Teaching the Dialect-Speaking Child / 15
Suggestions for Further Reading / 16

3 **The Learner, the Teacher, and the Classroom** / 17
Inside the Learner's Mind / 17
The Teacher's Attitude / 22
The Classroom Environment / 22
Suggestions for Further Reading / 25

4 **Learning from Error** / 26
Errors and Mistakes in Language Learning / 26
Recognizing the Differences Which Cause Errors / 30
The Teacher as "Doctor" / 39
Suggestions for Further Reading / 41

5 Practical Considerations / 42
Pronunciation and Grammar / 42
Vocabulary / 50
Communication / 51
Concluding Remarks / 52
Suggestions for Further Reading / 52

Foreword

Discussions on "language across the curriculum" have become commonplace among educators since the publication of the Bullock Report *A Language for Life* (London, HMSO, 1975) in 1975. The central argument of the Bullock Report — that the teaching of language should be integrated with all aspects of the school curriculum — is now widely accepted, and many teachers, principals, and administrators are currently working to develop and implement school language policies.

However, the phenomenon of language, which seems relatively straightforward when we take it for granted and just use it, becomes enormously complex when we begin to analyse it in depth and probe the relationships between what are generally regarded as its component parts, that is, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For example, most educators assume that a good basis in "oral language" is necessary for successful initial reading; yet research findings on this issue are not entirely consistent, some showing strong relationships between reading and oral language skills, while others find only weak relationships. The reason for this, of course, is that the term "oral language" can encompass a bewildering array of different skills whose interrelationships are anything but clear. For example, how is the grammatical accuracy of speech related to appropriateness of use in different contexts, or range of vocabulary related to fluency?

The relationships between reading and writing are no more clear than those between "oral language" and reading, with educational theorists and researchers proposing several different views. While the four broad language skills are obviously interrelated in some ways, there are other ways in which they are clearly independent; for example, knowing how to speak does not guarantee that a child will be successful in acquiring reading and writing skills. What this implies for educators is that without a clear conception of the nature of "language proficiency," and the ways in which its component parts are related to each other, it becomes extremely difficult to formulate a coherent policy on how language should be integrated with other aspects of the curriculum.

Issues related to language and literacy become even murkier when we add concerns about second-language acquisition and first-language maintenance among both children from linguistic minorities as well as those from the majority language group. As a result of considerable research during the past two decades we can be reasonably confident about some educational generalizations in regard to second-language programs. For example, we know that French immersion programs are considerably more effective in promoting French skills than traditional French-as-a-second-language programs. However, when we probe beneath the surface of these research studies, we are faced with the same issues that remain largely unresolved in first-language pedagogy. For example, the question of how long it takes an immigrant child to learn English, which has obvious policy implications both for the provision of ESL services and for psychological assessment, depends upon what we mean by "learning English." Understanding *why* immersion programs succeed in developing second-language skills so much more rapidly than traditional second-language programs involves understanding the nature of language and how it is acquired in first-language contexts.

The aim of the present series is to assist educators (including parents) to explore these issues concerning the nature and development of language and literacy. We hope not only to provide information in a straightforward and accessible form, but also to stimulate ideas and discussion about how the information or "facts" are related to each other and how they can be explained. In other words, we hope to stimulate the process of developing and refining theory because "facts" become relevant for both policy and practice only when they are integrated within a coherent theoretical framework.

All educational policy and practice is based on theory. Often, however, those theories are implicit, or are based on assumptions whose validity is questionable. One of the reasons for this is that researchers publish their findings in scholarly journals in a language that can often be understood only by other researchers. Practitioners are therefore largely excluded from access to these findings. Consequently, and appropriately, they base their practice on assumptions and intuitions derived from experience. However, implicit theories or assumptions unsupported by data are usually not sufficient to persuade others that changes in policy or practice are desirable. Information that can be generalized is required. Such information can serve either to confirm assumptions and intuitions or alternatively to cause them to be questioned.

Thus, we hope that the present series of monographs will contribute to the generation of new theoretical ideas and practical applications in the general areas of language and literacy. Although each monograph is devoted to a specific issue, we anticipate that collectively they will help define the dimensions of language and literacy in both bilingual and monolingual contexts.

Jim Cummins
Sharon Lapkin
Merrill Swain
Series Editors

Preface

A situation that teachers at any education level might face when teaching a "second" language is the presence in the classroom of native speakers of that language. This is especially true of the so-called "heritage" language classroom: that is, the classroom where children of immigrant backgrounds are taught the language of their ancestry or heritage. In such classrooms, as the Canadian experience has shown, the children tend to come from homes where they have been exposed to some regional variant of the language they are learning at school. This situation raises some fundamental questions about language, language learning, and language teaching. The purpose of this book is to address these questions in a non-technical fashion without the "critical apparatus" that is normally found in second-language manuals: it does not contain footnotes, and only the occasional reference. It is based primarily on my own research on dialect-speaking children — scattered in journals — and on the many discussions I have had with heritage language teachers in Canada.

Specifically, the book will deal with the following crucial issues involved in teaching a language to children who already have some form or degree of native competence in the target language:

- The first chapter considers the similarities and differences between "second-language" training and "heritage language" education. In the latter case, which is the theme of this book, the learner already has a communicatively functional knowledge of the target language. The main findings on ancestral language maintenance in immigrant children are also discussed in a non-technical way, so that teachers can become more aware of the documented benefits that can result from pedagogically effective heritage language programs.
- Chapter 2 looks closely at what is perhaps the most important question: the difference between the target, or classroom, language and the variant linguistic versions known by the learners. The target language is, of course,

the so-called "standard" language that has been codified, institutionalized, and conventionalized by the society of origin. I will thus discuss the concept of "dialect", or regionally determined variant, as it relates to the classroom. In the case of heritage language teaching, we essentially have a case of "second-dialect" teaching: the standard language is, scientifically speaking, more accurately a "standard dialect" with easily identifiable linguistic differences from "non-standard dialects." It is not a "superior" language, but simply a codified one.

- The third chapter will attempt to draw a "psychological profile" of the heritage language learner, and to derive some pedagogical implications from it. The underlying theme will be that the child already knows the target (standard) language in different degrees and in linguistically diverse ways. This stored linguistic knowledge can be used by the teacher to "catalyse" the learning process. I will argue that it is advantageous for both the learner and the teacher to use this knowledge.
- Chapter 4 relates the literature on "errors" in language learning to heritage language teaching.
- Finally, chapter 5 deals with practical instructional matters.

I wish to thank Dr. Jim Cummins, Director of the National Heritage Language Resource Unit (The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), and Alberto Di Giovanni, Director of the Centro Canadese Scuola e Cultura Italiana, for allowing me to carry out my research on heritage language learning and for supporting this project in a financial way. I also wish to thank Dr. Barbara Burnaby of the Modern Language Centre, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and the anonymous referee who read the manuscript and offered many important suggestions that have allowed me to improve the final version of this book significantly. Needless to say, any infelicities that it may contain are my sole responsibility. I truly hope that it will prove to be an accessible introduction to, and a convenient reference manual on, a frequently neglected subject in language pedagogy.

Marcel Danesi,
University of Toronto

1

Learning Ancestral Languages in School: What Does the Research Say?

After more than a decade of intensive research on the effects of studying a heritage language in elementary school, especially by Jim Cummins of The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, there now exists ample documentation indicating that heritage language education is beneficial from several points of view. A brief discussion of the research literature would, in my view, provide teachers with a sense of direction and purpose in their work and a broad picture of the language learning process itself.

Some Terms

Because the terminology in language pedagogy is often confusing and misleading, it would be helpful to define some widely used terms as clearly and as unambiguously as possible in order to understand what is involved in heritage language learning. The pertinent terms are: *first language, second language, foreign language, heritage language, ancestral language,* and *bilingualism.*

The term *first language*, symbolized as L1, is the first, or native, language. In the research literature it is often designated as the *mother tongue*. The *second language*, symbolized as L2, is any language learned after the first. This is, of course, a definition with a psychological focus. In language education, this term is often used to imply any language studied formally at school which is not the official language (or languages) spoken in the society. Thus it is that the term *foreign language* is often used as a synonym for L2. In the case of *heritage language* programs, the language taught in the classroom is either the student's home language or, in later generations, the language of ancestry (= the *ancestral language*). The terms *heritage language* (= HL) and *ancestral language* are used interchangeably in the literature. It is, in

my view, appropriate to refer to the HL as a "*second language*" in an educational sense, since it implies that the learning process is being formalized in a school setting where the HL is not the "first" or primary language of instruction. Only in those cases where the HL is being learned in an immersion type of situation can it be referred to as a kind of formal "L1" training. But the most common form of HL education in Canada is the single course in which the learning focus is the language itself.

The term *bilingualism*, when applied to HL children, is confusing. Technically, it means the ability to speak two languages with a high level of proficiency in both. When it comes to HL learners, it is probably a dialect version of the language that is known. Moreover, these learners have some knowledge of the ways in which the HL is used in the immigrant community at large. Most of these children are, in reality, "*bidialectal*," or becoming so, with respect to the HL; they are "*bilingual*" with reference to the dominant language.

Ancestral Language Programs

Ancestral or heritage language programs throughout Canada reflect in an overt and manifest way the country's commitment to a policy of multiculturalism. The intent of this policy, which was approved unanimously by the Canadian Parliament in 1971, is to assist those ethno-cultural groups actively striving to preserve, develop, and share their heritage with other Canadians. Most provincial governments have set up HL programs within their elementary school systems. Alberta became the first province to pass legislation in 1971 permitting languages other than English and French to be used and taught in elementary school. Shortly thereafter, the Ukrainian–English bilingual program in Edmonton became the first HL program in Canada.

Following in the footsteps of this successful program, most of the other provinces now have established HL programs or courses. In Ontario, a HL program was legislated in 1977, consisting primarily of non-credit courses given either within or outside the regular school hours. Native and Inuit languages are taught as school subjects in various parts of the country.

There seem to be two main types of HL programs:

- The type that is similar to French "immersion" programs in which the ancestral language is used as a medium of instruction for all, or some, school subjects.
- The type that offers the ancestral language as a school subject, usually non-credit. This is the most common type, and the one to which the concepts in this book will apply. In other words, the language is taught as any other "*second language*."

Whatever the case may be, HL programs/courses are, in a certain sense, "acculturation facilitators," since they allow the children of ethnic groups the opportunity to fit in gradually with the dominant culture, not by stifling

or eradicating their cultural-linguistic background, but by incorporating it into the educational acculturation process.

The mother tongue provides the conceptual labels and categories which allow for the acquisition of all knowledge. Without this medium, it would be virtually impossible to learn anything. Imagine a person placed within a linguistically diverse environment and then required to learn everything in terms of the new, unfamiliar language. Clearly, this would be a herculean task. But this is exactly the situation in which many immigrant children find themselves. They are faced with learning mathematics, reading skills, geography, and so on, in terms of a new linguistic medium. It is plain common sense to allow such children some time, initially, to use their mother tongue to learn at school.

This, obviously, would seem to favor the "immersion" educational model, at least in a transitional way. In practice, however, it is probably impossible to accommodate so many languages into the HL framework. But this does not mean that the HL classroom cannot be used, in some clearly defined areas and contexts, as an academic "support system." After all, arithmetic is arithmetic, no matter which language is used to teach it. Specifically, I would like to suggest that, wherever it is required and possible, HL teachers help the other teachers of their school by giving those immigrant children experiencing learning difficulties in a subject some additional training in the HL. In this way, two positive effects can result: the HL will take on a new significance and value for the learners; and the HL can be used to solve academic problems that may not be solvable in any other way. In addition, this would lead to more meaningful interaction between HL teachers and other teachers, leading to a better understanding of each other's problems, requirements, and expectations.

Some Research Findings

Research for over a decade on the linguistic, cognitive, and academic effects of learning an ancestral language at school — especially the seminal research of Jim Cummins of The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education — has clearly indicated the benefits to be gained from this kind of instruction. Let's now look specifically at the research findings related to the two questions most often asked in HL education:

- What effects do HL programs have on the learning of the dominant language(s)?
- How do HL programs affect overall academic performance and cognitive development?

As regards the first question, empirical facts show that, far from damaging the learning of the dominant language, the linguistic skills developed from studying a HL — or any language for that matter — are transferred automatically to the learning of all other languages, including and especially the dominant one. This finding is not surprising from a psychological stand-

point. The exposure to grammatical concepts and patterns in the HL forces the children to reflect upon language structure in a general way and to make conscious comparisons between their HL and English or French. This, in itself, develops their language skills considerably.

In the past, immigrant children, on entering elementary school, were often discouraged from using their mother tongue. This has been called "subtractive" bilingualism because the intent was the subtraction of the child's mother tongue and its replacement with the dominant one. If the children entered the school system with some proficiency in the dominant language, few problems were seen to emerge; but in the case of those children who started school with little or no knowledge of the dominant language, the academic results tended to be negative, at least initially. The psychological literature now makes it clear that those behavioral consequences were probably due to the very nature of subtractive bilingualism. The immigrant children simply had not developed the levels of proficiency in both their languages to allow them to function properly in an academic environment. Cummins has referred to this as the "threshold hypothesis," which suggests that there may be levels of linguistic proficiency bilingual children must attain in order to avoid cognitive deficits.

By learning the mother tongue formally at school, the children are "adding," not "subtracting," a language to their linguistic competence. This form of "additive" bilingualism implies the attainment of high levels of proficiency in both the child's mother tongue and in the dominant language. Through HL programs and courses, schools have been shown to take on the role of crucial literacy-imparting institutions.

There are, however, some lingering doubts. For instance, it is pointed out that the immigrant child might be carrying extra burdens: two linguistic systems must be kept separate and this causes frequent language "mixing" and "code-switching." While this is true to a certain degree, it is also a characteristic fact of all language learning. Ethnic children must struggle, like all other children, with problems of linguistic interference. In due course, however, the increase in grammatical awareness that formal linguistic study produces will, by itself, clear up such minor difficulties. Another doubt is often raised with respect to the suitability of HL courses for "poorer" students. Once again, this is a general educational problem, rather than one tied specifically to HL education. In all probability, poor achievement can be traced to sociological variables in many cases. Bilingual children who belong to low prestige language groups and/or lower socioeconomic status manifest some difficulty in tasks requiring the use of the dominant language, while those who come from groups who consider themselves to be equals to the surrounding groups tend to show no reduction in their ability to perform well. Moreover, some of the observed difficulties might be due to extraneous instructional or curricular variables, rather than being connected to some intrinsic aspect of the learning process itself. Thus, many of the purported disadvantages of HL education have no psychological basis in fact, since they are probably related to social/educational patterns that reach substantially beyond bilingualism.

The findings on HL education could be summarized as follows:

- HL children show an increased ability to analyse the linguistic points of both the HL and the dominant language. By seeing their mother tongue as one particular system among many, and thus viewing its forms under more general categories, the children develop an increased awareness of linguistic operations.
- HL children demonstrate an improvement in the dominant language after being enrolled in a HL course.
- HL children reveal an increased ability in conceptual and creative thinking, especially in comparison to their peers who are not enrolled in similar programs.
- HL children show a sharpened sensitivity to the communicative needs of others.
- HL children have a facility in learning additional languages.

Given such findings, why do doubts persist? Perhaps it is simply a matter of perception. Whereas most educators are now willing to accept French–English bilingualism as a worthwhile and attainable goal, bilingualism involving other languages still has an "image problem," so to speak. Another possible cause might be the very term "heritage" or "ancestral." In western Canada, where such programs are referred to as "bilingual," studies report a more favorable disposition towards them.

To conclude the discussion on the research findings, I would like to suggest that the main reason for the documented positive outcomes might actually be a very simple one. Immigrant children who become emotionally comfortable with their home language because they are studying it at school will tend to perform better academically than their peers who feel ambivalent about their language. If the child's first language and culture are accorded respect within the school system, then that individual will develop a sense of self-worth which will make him/her easier to teach. Thus it is that such courses allow for personality development; and this will go a long way towards ensuring academic success.

Past, Present, and Future

The theme of this book is that by acquiring a linguistically "scientific" perspective of the dialect issue the teacher will be better able to respond to it and to exploit the child's knowledge for specific pedagogical purposes. Rather than continuing to approach dialect-induced problems in an *ad hoc* and intuitive fashion, an ability to detect dialect-related peculiarities will go a long way towards helping the teacher ask the right questions and then formulate suitable pedagogical solutions. I would like to emphasize from the very outset that it is the teacher's attitude which is of paramount importance. An acceptance of the home dialect will, by itself, help to prevent the formation of negative associations that might otherwise take place; such associations can only hinder the learning process. Given the acceptance of this basic

common-sensical principle, the rest will follow logically. A methodology which takes into account the knowledge the student brings to the classroom will help develop, within the child, a conscious awareness of the differences between the home dialect and the standard language which, technically, is the "*target*" language.

Finally, I would like to suggest a "pedagogical" reason behind the apparent success of HL programs. Because of the efforts and devotion of the individual classroom teacher, the HL educational experiment could not be anything but successful. From my own contacts with HL teachers, I have been impressed by a willingness to learn and to try out all kinds of concepts and techniques. This attitude is laying the foundations for an auspicious future. HL teachers have always shown themselves to be resourceful and adaptive. As the saying goes, "necessity is the mother of invention."

Suggestions for Further Reading

Jim Cummins, *Bilingualism and Minority Language Children.* Toronto: OISE Press, 1981.

Jim Cummins, *Bilingualism and Special Education: Issues in Assessment and Pedagogy.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1984.

There are many studies published by this prolific scholar on the linguistic, cognitive, and academic effects related to mother tongue maintenance. However, these two books constitute his most comprehensive treatments of the topic. They are a must for all HL teachers.

•••••

Jim Cummins, ed., *Heritage Language Education: Issues and Directions.* Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1983.

This anthology of writings on a wide range of topics related to HL education will help the teacher gain a "global" perspective of this fascinating educational experiment.

•••••

Fred Genesee, "Schools, Bilingualism, and Multiculturalism," in *Multiculturalism, Bilingualism, and Canadian Institutions,* edited by Keith A. McLeod, pp. 89-101. Toronto: Faculty of Education, University of Toronto, 1979.

There are many studies by such scholars as Grittner, Lambert, Tucker, Rivers, Chastain, and many others which document the advantages of bilingualism. This article is a good overview of the relevant research.

•••••

Terence MacNamee and Hilary White, "Heritage Language in the Preschool," *Language and Society,* 15 (1985), 20-23.

This article makes a strong case for establishing HL programs in the preschool.

2

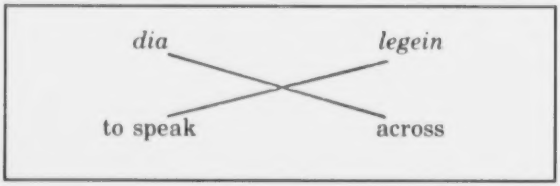
Dialect and Language

The popular conception of the term "*dialect*" as meaning an odd or comical substandard way of talking is a misleading one; its meaning in linguistics is very different. Therefore, to put this term into its proper perspective, I shall devote some space to the linguist's conception.

What Is a Dialect?

As used in linguistics, the term *dialect* implies systematic "differences," not a peculiar or funny way of talking. When two people communicate with each other in a dialect, they certainly do not laugh at their speech habits. Laughter seems to occur when talking *about* one's dialect, especially in comparison to the standard language. It appears to be simply a humorous response to verbal differences.

The word "*dialect*" comes originally from the Greek *diálektos* meaning "discussion." This word was itself derived from a compound verb:



Thus, etymologically, the term means simply "to speak (across) to someone." This meaning can be seen still in the related word "*dialogue*." In linguistics, the term *dialect* has come to mean the speech patterns that vary as a consequence of geographical extension. For the linguist, a dialect exemplifies the

verbal characteristics of a group of speakers of a language tied together by geographical location. A *dialect* is, therefore, a "*language*" in the scientific sense of the word. For what concerns us here, it can be said that a "*standard language*" is really no more than a dialect that, for historical reasons, has become the common code for a group of speakers bound together by sociocultural and political factors. It is, in other words, the "*prestige dialect*" that has been shaped and moulded in order to become a standardized tool of literary and cultural expression. For example, in Italy the Florentine dialect became the prestige dialect for various social, cultural, and political reasons during the Middle Ages (it was the language of such great writers as Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch). In Spain, the Castilian dialect came to be the prestige dialect for similar reasons. Over time, such prestige dialects were eventually transformed into national languages. The point to be emphasized here is that dialects *are* languages, even if they have not had the good fortune of having become national languages. Many so-called dialects, like Sicilian, for example, have their own rich literary tradition which often rivals that of the national language.

Actually, any kind of variation in speech, even that caused by social roles, educational background, and so on, is considered in linguistics to be "dialectal." However, this type of variation is not relevant to our purposes. Here, the term *dialect* will be limited to mean "geographical variant."

Problems of perception vis-à-vis a dialect emerge when the speaking of the dialect is associated with some sociological condition (for example, socioeconomic status). Serious problems can arise in the educational sphere when it is believed that the dialect is itself a factor in bringing about the sociological condition. The members of any language community are sensitive to speech differences. This is a natural behavioral phenomenon. After all, we immediately recognize, and have definite opinions about, differences in dress code, in physical appearance, and so on, from an accepted "social norm." What we are really reacting to is the perceived *appropriateness* of some difference, not to the *difference* itself. Similarly, upon hearing dialectal speech patterns, a certain "sociological image," so to speak, might be evoked in our minds. But from a purely scientific standpoint, dialectal speech simply implies "formal" differences.

Let's look more closely at what is meant by formal linguistic differences. It is immediately obvious that the speech of a lawyer is different from, say, the speech of a merchant in the course of their work. For one thing, the lawyer tends to choose words that are called anecdotally "ten dollar words" more than the merchant normally would. This type of formal difference is called, technically, *lexical*, that is, it is a difference in vocabulary style. The lawyer's speech also tends to show a much more complex sentence structure with many subordinate clauses. The merchant's "grammar" is much more "to the point." This kind of formal difference is referred to as *syntactic*. Differences can also be found at the levels of *morphology*, or word construction and inflection, and *phonology*, or patterns of pronunciation. When it comes to dialectal differences, linguists likewise talk about differences in *lexicon, syntax, mor-*

phology, and *phonology.* These can be easily identified and itemized by comparison.

The scientific investigation of dialects began in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Since the turn of the present century, linguists have given us what are commonly called "*linguistic atlases,*" which convey a clear picture of how language varies along a geographical continuum. As the name implies, a linguistic atlas is a collection of maps showing the different manifestations of a word-concept, of a phrase, and so on, in a specific geographical area. Such atlases are compiled by means of questionnaires which trained interviewers utilize with informants in the target regions. As an example, the following map of Italy shows how the word for "boy," which is rendered as "*ragazzo*" in standard Italian, is realized throughout the peninsula. On this map, you will not only notice *lexical* differences, but *phonological* ones as well. These differences can be grouped together to determine the major dialect areas that make up Italy. Indeed, maps such as this one will allow us to mark off dialect areas with some precision on the basis of varying lexical, syntactic, morphological, and phonological traits (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 — The Words for "Boy" in Italy
Adapted from Arturo Tosi, *Immigration and Bilingual Education.* Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1984, p. 74.

In a historical sense, even the "languages" of a so-called "language family" are in reality dialects. For instance, the "languages" of the Romance family are nothing but "dialects" of Latin that drifted apart in the first centuries of the Christian era. The following chart should make this clear:

Latin	French	Spanish	Italian
lac*t*em 'milk'	la*it*	le*ch*e	la*tt*e
oc*t*o 'eight'	hu*it*	o*ch*o	o*tt*o
noc*t*em 'night'	nu*it*	no*ch*e	no*tt*e
fac*t*um 'done'	fa*it*	he*ch*o	fa*tt*o
tec*t*um 'roof'	to*it*	te*ch*o	te*tt*o
etc.	etc.	etc.	etc.

The chart shows a definite correspondence pattern that can be established between the various Romance words and their Latin sources. The consonant sequence "*ct*", for example, can be seen to correspond to "*it*" in French, to "*ch*" in Spanish, and to "*tt*" in Italian. These differences are due in part to geographical factors. But it is clear that these languages are related "phylogenetically":

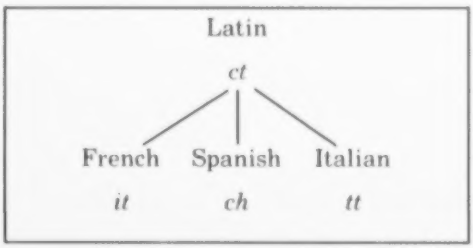


Figure 2 — "CT" in Some Romance Languages

The main reason why such differences are no longer perceived to be "dialectal" is simply because the French "*neo-Latin dialect*" now marks a specific sociocultural and political reality, as do the Spanish and Italian ones.

The Ancestral Language as a Community Language

The ancestral language is, in many cases, the language of an immigrant community, and as such it tends to develop a character of its own, different from that associated with the language as it is used in its natural linguistic environment in the country of origin. A "*community language*," therefore, is simply the language of the country of origin as it is used in the ethnic community at large. If this community is a sizeable one, then the tendency seems to be the emergence of geographically identifiable "settlements," or

"districts," where the language of origin is used ordinarily among first-generation immigrants to conduct business transactions and commercial exchanges of all kinds. Such interactional settings have contributed to a dialect-levelling effect and to the spawning of what linguists call a "*koiné*," that is, a generalized version of the speech habits of the different dialectal groups for the purpose of communication. The "*koiné*" is, in fact, synonymous with "*community language*."

The immigrant's language of origin will eventually develop a character and "physiology" all of its own in the new social environment. This is because of the well documented fact that wherever there are prolonged linguistic contacts there is bound to be the borrowing of words. The culturally and communicatively dominant language is the one that will have its words borrowed. These words, known by the metaphor "*loanwords*," reflect what is essentially an adaptive process. The speakers of the receiving immigrant language are attempting to understand and to adapt to a new way of life, and as a consequence will make use of the words from the dominant language to refer to the everyday objects, concepts, ways of behaving and thinking for which words or phrases are unavailable in their own language. In cases of protracted contact, it is not unusual to find even the borrowing of words for which the native language has equivalents. This is due, no doubt, to the communicative frequency with which the loanwords are used in the environment, and perhaps even to the psychological fact that the borrowed items refer to culturally different ways of expressing the same reality. Consider, for instance, the following cases for which English tends itself to use borrowed words:

- "He ate the cake with great *gusto*"
- "Don't make such a *naive* statement"

It is true that one could replace the loanwords with words such as *enthusiasm* (for the Italian word *gusto*) and *simplistic* (for the French word *naive*), but such equivalents do not really express the same meaning, nor do they evoke the same mental image. Like sound waves that are just slightly out of phase, the loanwords and the native equivalents are not really "synchronizable." The loanwords allows us to express subtle semantic nuances.

As the loanwords pass into general currency among the members of the immigrant community, they are altered systematically in pronunciation in terms of the sound patterns of the receiving language, and then are incorporated into daily speech habits. Thus it is that the language of origin develops a new physical make up. Bolstered by many new words gleaned from the new society, this language also takes on a new character and function. It might be said that it gives a linguistic expression to the ways in which the immigrant interacts with the new environment.

Consider, as a case for illustration, the community language that characterizes the speech of Italian immigrants living in Southern Ontario. This is the case with which I am most familiar and, thus, more able to discuss as a case in point. Nevertheless, what holds true for Italian is applicable to any immigrant language.

The Italian spoken in Canada does not have a single form. In its diversity it parallels the heterogeneous dialect situation that characterizes the language spoken in Italy. It is, therefore, more accurate to say that the loan-words have been adapted according to one's home dialect. Nevertheless, one can speak of a general community language that has arisen as a result of the communication among speakers of different dialectal backgrounds within the Italian community. It is the language used, for example, in Italian-speaking stores, restaurants, places of work, and the like. This language constitutes a continuum, ranging from pure dialect to standard forms of Italian. The individual speaker's position on this continuum is determined primarily by educational background; namely, by how much schooling, and consequent exposure to the standard language, the speaker had previously in Italy.

How are English words adapted phonetically to become Italian ones? Without going into the technical details, a general understanding of what happens can be gained by considering a few examples. Let's take the two words "*car*" and "*(to) drive.*" These words have become equivalents for the standard Italian words "*automobile/macchina*" and "*guidare.*" In the case of "*car,*" the following processes have taken place. First, it is given a shape identical to that of native Italian nouns; that is, it is given an ending. In this case the ending is "*o,*" thus assigning the word to the masculine gender. This is referred to as morphological adaptation:

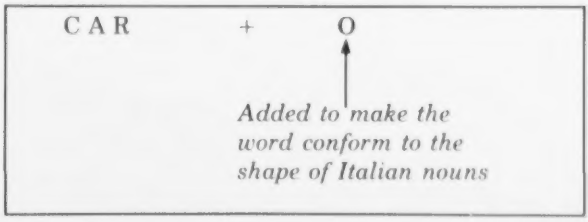


Figure 3 — Morphological Adaptation of "Car"

Then, the consonant represented by "*r*" is doubled. This is in conformity with a general pattern of Italian sound structure; namely, that between vowels consonants tend to be doubled. This is, clearly, a case of phonological adaptation:

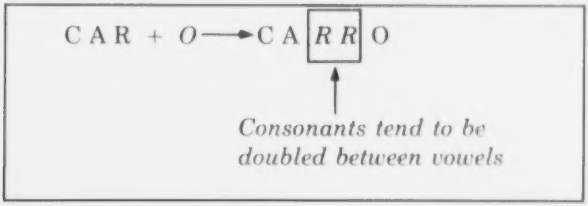


Figure 4 — Phonological Adaptation of "Car"

The vowel represented by "*a*" in English is replaced by its Italian equivalent, also written as "*a*," but different in articulation. The end result is the word "*carro*" which is now identical in shape and pronunciation to any native Italian word.

Similarly, in the case of "*(to) drive*," the word is adapted to Italian sound patterns and assigned to the first conjugation verb paradigm, identified by the infinitive ending "*-are*":

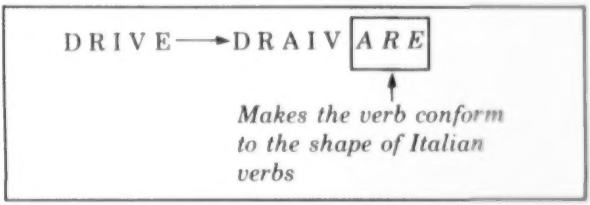


Figure 5 — The Adaptation of "(to) Drive"

Such adaptation processes characterize all the words that have become fixtures of speech in the Italian community language. The following chart will give the reader some idea of how common English words have been adapted:

Borrowed Word	*Adapted Form*	*Italian Equivalent*
	NOUNS	
brick	"bricco"	mattone
furniture	"fornitura"	mobilia
furnace	"fornace"	caldaia
lane	"lena"	vicolo/corsia
store	"storo"	negozio
sink	"sinco"	acquaio/lavandino
tank	"tenca"	serbatoio
cake	"checca"	torta
popcorn	"pappacorno"	———
job	"giobba"	lavoro/impiego
fence	"fenza"	recinto
garbage	"garbiccio"	immondizia
truck	"trocco"	camion/autocarro
mortgage	"morgheggio"	ipoteca
shovel	"sciabola"	pala
	VERBS	
to squeeze	"squisare"	premere
to push	"pusciare"	spingere
to spell	"spellare"	———
to skate	"schizzare"	pattinare
to freeze	"frisare"	congelare
to paint	"pintare"	verniciare

Once a borrowed word has been adapted, it is then treated grammatically as any native item. Thus, nouns are pluralized in the normal fashion, and verbs are conjugated like native ones:

- CARRO "car" CARRI "cars"
- DRAIVO "I drive"/HO DRAIVATO "I have driven"/etc.

Also found in the community language are literally translated constructions, known technically as "*calques*"; that is, phrases which are Italian reproductions of English phrases:

English Construction	*Calque*	*Italian*
I'm going *downtown*	Vado in "*bassa città*"	Vado *in centro*
Make the (phone) call!	"*Fa*" il telefono!	*Telefona!*
This doesn't *make* sense	Questo non "*fa*" senso	Questo non *ha* senso
The dress *looks* nice	Il vestito "*guarda*" bene	Il vestito ti *sta* bene

Similar patterns have been found in all community languages. Consider, for example, the following forms found in the Spanish spoken in Toronto:

Borrowed Word	*Italian Adapted Form*	*Spanish Adapted Form*
boss	"bosso"	"boso"
roof	"ruffo"	"rufo"
nurse	"norsa"	"norsa"
factory	"fattoria"	"factoria"
street	"stritto"	"estrito"
switch	"suiccia	"esuich"
yard	"iarda"	"yarda"
job	"giobba"	"joba"

I have also heard Toronto Serbo-Croatians say things such as "kichna" (*kitchen*), "shtof" (*stove*), "kara" (*car*), "vurkati" (*to work*), and "lajka" (*he/she likes*).* The point is that the borrowing process is a typical and understan-

*My casual observations have been confirmed by a doctoral candidate in the Department of Slavic Studies at the University of Toronto who is carrying out research on the language of Serbo-Croatians living in Ontario.

dable one. It reflects in a conspicuous manner how a language adapts to its new environment. An examination of the loanwords will invariably show that most are nouns referring to common objects or concepts that make up the immigrant's new reality. Rarely do they refer to abstract notions. In other words, the loanwords describe the immigrant's new environment in ways that would not be possible by means of the native vocabulary. The loanwords that have gained general currency are the result of a need: the need to relate in a direct verbal way to the new social and psychological reality.

Teaching the Dialect-Speaking Child

What implications could the linguist's view of "*dialect*" and "*community language*" have for HL teaching? There are two answers to this essentially rhetorical question — one long and one short. The long answer constitutes the subject matter of the remaining three chapters of this book. The short answer is that what the HL teacher probably stands to gain most from a scientific understanding of "*dialect*" is an "insight" into the "language personality" of the dialect-speaking child, since to know a dialect is to know a "language" that is related geographically to the standard language (= "target" language of the classroom).

It might be useful, before going on, to itemize in point form some general pedagogical principles based on the scientific view of "*dialect*" which will form the "thematic thread" of the remaining chapters:

- A "*dialect*" is a "language" in the scientific sense of the word. It is defined in terms of formal linguistic differences vis-à-vis the standard language (= the "*prestige dialect*").
- Upon entering a HL program, dialect-speaking children are faced with the task of learning a new form of their language which might vary quite markedly from the "*mother dialect.*"
- The learning task is similar, in many respects, to the learning of a "*second language,*" or more accurately, "*second dialect.*" The magnitude of the task will, of course, vary from child to child; and the fact that what has been acquired at home is called "Italian," "Polish," "Portuguese," or whatever, must not obscure this fact.
- The teacher should concentrate on formal linguistic differences, attempting to eliminate any possible negative perceptions attached to dialectal speech.
- The teacher should focus on only those features of dialect speech that differ from the standard language in such a way as to damage the meaning of a message. In other words, the degree of pedagogical intervention needed is proportional to the degree of formal difference between the dialect and the standard language.

- In addition to "dialectal" peculiarities, the HL teacher might be faced with characteristics tied to the community language, as discussed in this chapter. Once again, the teacher should not associate or reinforce any possible negative perception vis-à-vis the community language.
- The use of the HL in the ethnic community has an important practical implication. There is no need for the teacher to classify a set of expressions or images as belonging to a far away culture. The teacher can, and should, refer to such things as ways in which the HL has become a valuable mode of communication in the present culture.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Marcel Danesi, *Loanwords and Phonological Methodology*. Montreal: Didier, 1985.

This book discusses the nature of loanword adaptation, primarily in Italian (although other languages are taken into consideration as well). It also discusses the nature of community languages as they are shaped by the new environment.

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K. M. Petyt, *The Study of Dialect: An Introduction to Dialectology*. London: Blackwell, 1980.

This is a good introduction to the scientific study of dialectal speech written in non-technical language.

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Arturo Tosi, *Immigration and Bilingual Education*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1984.

This book offers a good discussion of the social and educational issues connected with the teaching of ancestral languages. It also develops the concept of community language.

3

The Learner, the Teacher, and the Classroom

The learning "style" that characterizes dialect speakers of the target language will be shaped as much by their attitude towards both the language of the classroom and of the home as by the possible "interference" effects caused by the formal linguistic differences between home and school versions. The question of *attitude* is a crucial one indeed. Understanding that a dialect *is* a language and that it constitutes the learner's "linguistic competence" will, in itself, help much to foster a positive attitude in both the learner and the teacher and, thus, help create a relaxed and enjoyable classroom environment.

Inside the Learner's Mind

It has become somewhat of a pedagogical aphorism or cliché to say that effective language teaching is based, in part, on knowing what goes on in the learner's mind during the various stages of the learning process. Common sense alone dictates that by gaining a basic familiarity with the features that characterize the student's mental "learning apparatus" a teacher will be in a far better position to develop an appropriate and responsive teaching style than one who is oblivious to such features. By "entering inside the learner's mind" it will be easier to make appropriate choices of instructional techniques, of pedagogical support material, of the items to be taught, of the sequence in which to teach them, and so on. Moreover, a teacher will tend to be more tolerant of the many "errors" caused by the "mechanisms" that make up the student's learning apparatus.

Entering the learner's mind will be particularly useful, if not indispensable, when the learner in question is a dialect speaker. The pattern of differences between the dialect and the target language cannot be ignored, because it forms the mental "filter" through which the learner processes the classroom

input. And since this "processing" is largely automatic and unconscious, it can often "get in the way" when there are significant differences. Knowing what's inside the dialect-speaking child's mind – the perceptions of the learning task, the attitudes towards the home language, and the components of the linguistic knowledge brought to the task at hand – will enable the teacher to anticipate learning difficulties and, thus, to formulate suitable instructional practices.

So, let's start our brief "journey" through the learner's mind. The first "signpost" that we are bound to encounter is a perceptual one: the HL child's perception of the learning task reflects the way he/she feels about the ethnic culture. There is typically a strong tendency in such children to want to replace the language of origin with the majority language (English or French). This well-documented phenomenon is an understandable result of environmental conditioning and stimulation: the children are continually bombarded by the majority language on TV, on the radio, on the street, with their friends. This leads to the following all-too-common situation: children who maintain basic comprehension skills in their ancestral language because of exposure to it in the home environment, but who are gradually losing their productive (speaking) skills.

This situation might lead – in a "worst case scenario" – to the child's rejection of his/her ancestry which, in turn, could lead to an unwillingness to perform well in the classroom. This is especially true if the child perceives the ethnic background to be the feature that sets him/her apart from the others. Children have a strong need to fit in with their peer group, and this can become a powerful psychological motive that might force them to reject their roots. Figure 6 encapsulates this point in an eloquent visual manner.

Figure 6 – The Child's Perception of Ethnicity
Source: Jim Cummins, *Bilingualism and Minority-Language Children.* Toronto: OISE Press, 1981, p. 14.

Success in learning the HL in a formal school environment will depend largely on instilling in the child a sense that learning the ancestral tongue is a practical skill that can be used to communicate with the people who play an important role in the immediate environment. The point to be emphasized here is that classroom teaching should focus on language as a functional code for communication, not as an abstract accumulation of forms (articles, nouns, verb paradigms, and so on). An undue emphasis on the formal architecture of the language, without frequent references to its practical uses, will tend to produce disappointing results. Children are interested in *what* is communicated, not in *how* language is organized grammatically.

The second "signpost" that will be encountered is the child's attitude towards the home dialect. More often than not, an association between speaking a "dialect" and lower class status, illiteracy, or something similar tends to be made in urbanized societies. Vestiges of such social stigmas continue to persist even when the members of a language community emigrate and use their mother tongue in the new social milieu. Clearly the dialect-speaking child who is made to feel ashamed of the home dialect will invariably develop a mental block towards the learning task. Feeling inhibited and unsure of the linguistic forms to use in the classroom, such a child will probably end up not speaking at all and eventually disliking the ancestral language.

Often, HL children receive their negative perceptions from the home environment itself where a confused picture of the relationship between the "dialect" and the "standard language" is imparted to the child in an imperceptible manner. It is little wonder, therefore, that many dialect-speaking children hesitate to express themselves in the classroom, especially if a negative attitude towards their speech habits is reinforced there. What they must be made to understand is that those features which differentiate their own speech from the language taught at school are simply *that* — different linguistic traits. This seems the best way to put such children at ease vis-à-vis their dialectal background and on the path towards a successful learning experience. The children who are made to understand that their speech peculiarities are not due to any fault of their own, or to any "defective" habits, will be in a better position to develop a positive attitude towards the home language, towards the learning task, and ultimately towards themselves. Above all, the teacher should always keep in mind that it is damaging to adopt a "remedial" attitude towards the learner. By locating the "problem" within the child, remedial teaching practices violate what psychologists know about how the language is acquired.

The final "signpost" in our journey reveals the nature of the child's linguistic competence. The internal linguistic apparatus dialect speakers bring to the learning task is a complex one indeed. Since they live in a sociocultural environment where the majority language dominates, they normally possess some degree of competence in the dominant language. Moreover, their competence in the mother tongue can be characterized as a form of what psychologists call "*compound*" bilingualism. In this form, the individual is not always consciously aware of the linguistic differences be-

tween the two codes. And, in most cases, one of the two codes is communicatively dominant. The ideal form of bilingualism is known generally as "*coordinate.*" This implies a high level of conscious separation of the two codes and a high level of control over their differential forms.

In the case of dialect-speaking children, it is accurate to say that they possess a form of "trilingualism": knowledge of the dominant language gleaned from the sociocultural environment in which they live; and knowledge of two different versions of the mother tongue (= compound bilingualism). As pointed out in the opening chapter, L1 is the symbol used to refer to the mother tongue. In dialect-speaking children, the dominant code with respect to the ancestral language is a dialectal version which can be symbolized as L1-*d* (*d* = dialect version). The standard language can, therefore, be symbolized as L1-*s* (*s* = standard version); and this is the less dominant one, being often only *comprehended*. The inability to distinguish between L1-*d* and L1-*s* is, in a nutshell, the cause of many of the problems that might emerge in the learning process. Teachers should, consequently, focus on *separating* the two "L1 codes" and on transforming this stored passive knowledge into a fully functional one.

Actually, it can be said that the case of dialect speakers presents a peculiar instance of the "L2" being identical to the less dominant code which makes up their linguistic competence. Such students are, in essence, striving to acquire the standard form of their ancestral language in the context of "second-language learning." The teacher should bear in mind that a separation process is involved, whereby the stored passive knowledge of the learner is separated from its compound bilingual form and gradually transformed into a conscious knowledge of the standard language. Since the learning process occurs in a "second-language context," it is appropriate to symbolize the end result as L2-*s*, or the standard version of the target language. At the same time, the teacher should always remember to take into account the growing dominance of the majority language in the learner's linguistic make up. This can be symbolized as L2-*m* (*m* = majority language). Let's review the symbols used and then illustrate the dialect speaker's stored linguistic competence, and the separation process involved, in a visual manner (see Figure 7):

- L1-*d* = dialectal form of the mother tongue
- L1-*s* = standard form of the mother tongue
- L2-*m* = the majority language
- L2-*s* = the standard form of the mother tongue as learned at school (= target language)

It might be useful to summarize some of the main implications that can be derived from this kind of analysis:

- Dialect-speaking children already understand the target language in varying degrees because it is a component of their stored linguistic knowledge; but they do not always consciously differentiate between L2-*s* and what they already know.

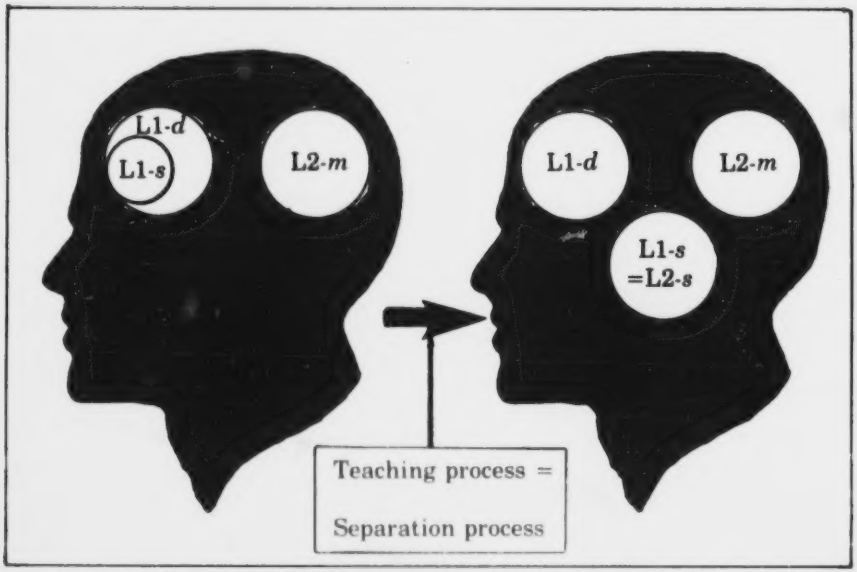


Figure 7 — The Pedagogical "Separation" Process

- The degree of dominance of the dialect will vary according to generation. Subsequent generations will tend to have only a passive knowledge of the ancestral language, or none at all, as they integrate into the majority culture. In subsequent generations, the majority language can also be an L1. In such a case, the teacher is no longer confronted with teaching dialect-speaking learners.
- The degree of difficulty experienced by the child in the learning process is directly proportional to the degree of difference between the home dialect and the target language.
- The teaching process should aim at separating the codes of the child's linguistic competence, not at eradicating the dialect component of this competence.

It is crucial to understand that the dialect speaker's difficulties are *not* due to any "deficiency," but rather to what psychologists call a "creative construction" process. Such learners are continually constructing a system — known technically as an "*interlanguage system*" — in which they are testing hypotheses about the target language on the basis of what they know. As a matter of fact, the peculiar forms produced by dialect-speaking children are observable tokens that their creative efforts are taking place. These can, indeed, provide valuable feedback about their interlanguage system.

The Teacher's Attitude

The previous "journey" has, hopefully, been an instructive one. It was intended, in part, to make it clear that the child's knowledge of a dialect is not a disadvantage, and that this knowledge should be utilized to form the basis of many classroom routines. But perhaps the main lesson to be learned from the journey is that *attitude* — the learner's and the teacher's — is the key element in successful HL learning.

As a general working principle in education, it is now an empirically established fact that for learning to occur at all it is imperative to create a congenial classroom environment. This is because human beings are emotional creatures who are easily influenced by what psychologists call "affective" (emotional) variables. Research on the affective component in language learning has been growing steadily over the years and has yielded unequivocal findings in at least one area, namely, that the removal of anxiety, frustration, and inhibitions from the learning process will go a long way towards ensuring a satisfying learning experience. This is especially true in the case of older dialect-speaking children. In such children, the consciousness of self increases dramatically; and it is in constant need of protection. It is obvious, from all the psychological documentation at our disposal, that self-identity is inextricably bound up with the mother tongue. Viewing the child's home language as "unacceptable" can only be counterproductive to the establishment of an affective stability which is essential in order to get on with the daily routines of the classroom.

Thus the teacher should, first and foremost, attempt to foster a positive attitude towards the speech habits already possessed by the children. This does not imply condoning persistent errors, but simply accepting them as tokens of their linguistic background. Instructional practice and materials can then be formulated to turn the trial-and-error struggle into a successful and satisfying learning experience. Specifically, the teacher should:

- avoid criticism of dialect-related peculiarities;
- allow the children to speak freely without frequent interruptions to correct errors;
- explain in ways that are understandable to the children what is involved in the learning task;
- invite "linguistic comparisons" that might even become the basis for some instructional objective.

The Classroom Environment

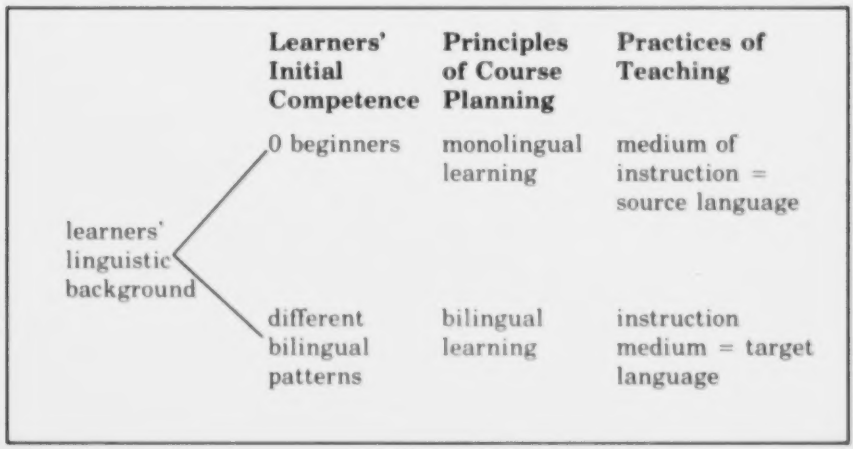
The English saying, "there's no place like home," contains some very wise advice when it comes to the teaching of children in general, and HL children in particular. The very nature of the learning experience lends itself to the creation of a classroom environment that can be described as an extension of the home. Let's look briefly at why this is so.

As mentioned earlier, a HL refers to the language that belongs to the child's

ethnocultural ancestry. This means that the learner, unlike beginners in other L2 programs, already knows something about the target language. Arturo Tosi, a researcher in the field of minority-language education, has made the following relevant observations about the HL classroom:

- Unlike the beginners in normal L2 programs (whom he calls "0 beginners"), the initial competence of HL children is characterized by some degree of knowledge of the target language (which he calls "different bilingual patterns").
- With respect to the principles of course planning, this implies a situation of "bilingual learning."
- With respect to teaching practices, the target language can be used from the very outset as the medium of instruction. This, in itself, extends the home environment linguistically.

Tosi summarizes his observations with the following chart:



Source: Arturo Tosi, "Community Language Teaching to Bilingual Learners: Towards a Systematic Approach to Its Methodology and Curriculum," *Quaderni d'Italianistica*, 6 (1985), p. 135.

In addition to the use of the HL as the medium of instruction, the home environment can be replicated somewhat through the topics chosen for communicative purposes, or by means of cultural projects assigned to the children. These will often relate to ethnocultural concepts which the student has formed, to a great extent, in the home. An interesting result of this home–classroom interfacing was discovered several years ago by a survey conducted by the Metropolitan Separate School Board of Toronto (Ron Keyser and Jim Brown, *Heritage Language Survey Results*. Toronto: Metropolitan Separate School Board, 1981). The survey revealed that studying a HL in school encourages its use at home. I have also noticed that, as the children learn to

distinguish consciously between standard and dialectal versions of the HL, they bring this knowledge home, sensitizing their parents and grandparents linguistically in the process. The point to be made here is that by "feeling at home" in their classrooms, HL children will tend to show an increased willingness to use their ancestral tongue as a communicative tool; and this generates a favorable outlook on their ethnocultural background.

To the best of my knowledge, many HL courses still lack suitable pedagogical materials. With the help of government agencies, both administrators and teachers are remedying this situation by developing instructional materials of extremely high quality. But I have never come across materials which address the problem of dialect speech directly. Given the diversity of dialects, this is an understandable situation. Thus, it would seem that it is up to the teacher to prepare appropriate materials and to handle dialect-related problems in the classroom. I will look at this more closely in the next two chapters. Here, I want to summarize some pedagogical principles from the mass of research on second language acquisition that has been accumulating over the last few decades and that I consider valuable for HL instruction:

- *Diversification:* This implies that the teacher, not the textbook, should select a technique, taken from any methodological source, in order to tackle a specific learning task. The teacher should, therefore, become familiar with as many techniques as possible.
- *Adaptability:* This principle implies that, because of its complexity, language teaching should be as flexible and as adaptive as possible. In practice, this means that the teacher should always be prepared to go beyond the textbook and be willing to adapt to the ever-changing conditions of the classroom.
- *Psychological synchronization:* This implies that teaching practice should be synchronized with the psychological reality of learning. There are certain psychological constraints which characterize second-language learning and with which the teacher should be familiar. These have been abundantly documented and made accessible to the non-expert by many recent publications.
- *Contextualization:* The goal of language learning is both the development of linguistic and communicative competence. Teachers should always keep this in mind in their instructional practices by making every effort to teach items of grammar and vocabulary in a communicatively appropriate, or "contextualized," fashion.
- *Personalization:* The student's personality, social and academic background, intelligence, and so on, are crucial determinants of success. Above all else, the student should be made to feel at ease in the classroom. This can be done by personalizing the language samples employed; that is, by relating the grammatical and lexical items of

a specific learning unit to the experiences and interests of the students.

- *Error-expectancy:* The teacher should always expect and tolerate errors of all kinds. Errors are caused by systemic features of language learning. They are, in fact, indices that learning mechanisms have been activated.

In closing, it might be worthwhile to make one final observation on the classroom – this time with regard to its physical make up and layout. Wherever and whenever possible, the HL classroom should be made to look as culturally appropriate as possible. Posters, pictures, maps, and so on, which bring the HL culture visibly into the classroom, will help to create an environment that will foster a positive attitude.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Jim Cummins, *Bilingualism and Minority-Language Children.* Toronto: OISE Press, 1981.

This is the best non-technical introduction to the psychological and educational aspects of minority-language education.

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H. H. Stern, *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

This is perhaps the most comprehensive treatment of the scientific aspects of language teaching currently available.

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Renzo Titone and Marcel Danesi, *Applied Psycholinguistics: An Introduction to the Psychology of Language Learning and Teaching.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985.

This is an accessible introduction to the research literature on the psychology of language learning so that the teacher can make informed choices about appropriate teaching strategies.

4

Learning from Error

During the initial learning stages, it comes as no surprise to find that the dialect-speaking child's attempts to use the target language are influenced, to a large extent, by the stored linguistic knowledge described in the previous chapter. Since this kind of competence is in the form of unconscious knowledge and automatic habits, it often contributes to what are known technically as processing "*errors*." This term is, perhaps, an unfortunate one, given its negative connotations. But in second language psychology it implies something that is quite the opposite to its dictionary meaning. In this domain, "*errors*" are viewed as tangible signs that real learning is going on. So when one speaks of "*errors*" in the scientific sense of the word, a positive concept is implied. They form a crucial source of feedback from which both the child and the teacher can learn.

Errors and Mistakes in Language Learning

It is important, first of all, to distinguish terminologically between "*error*" and "*mistake*" as they are used in second language psychology. The child's "*errors*" are caused by the stored knowledge brought to the learning task. They form a pattern of predictable and easily recognizable speech forms which differ from the target language forms in linguistically specific ways. Errors are not perceived by learners because they are related to an internal "system"; as a consequence, they tend to persist until they are pointed out and understood at a conscious level. "*Mistakes*," on the other hand, are random aberrations which do not form any pattern. They are random slips or blunders that learners will normally recognize by themselves and correct without any help from the teacher.

The relevant research in this domain has shown that "*errors*" are a "fact of life" in learning. They are aberrations which can be seen to have an underlying cause: for example, interference from the native language, or false

analogies, or guesses. Learners are not consciously aware of their error patterns because they result from an incomplete knowledge of the target language. They are generated by the very process of attempting to produce target language forms on the basis of a developing competence, known technically as a creative construction system. In fact, not only do learners not recognize errors, but when their attention is drawn to them, they often cannot correct them: and, indeed, might even commit other errors in trying to do so.

An example of a mistake can be seen in the following hypothetical example. Suppose that someone says "The boy speaks *vely* well," and then immediately corrects the faulty word in the sentence (*very*). The pronunciation of "very" as "*vely*" is probably a result of the anticipation of the word "well" and of its "l" sound. We know that the person has confused two things, both of which the person intended to say. However, when a learner says something like "He *goed* away," or "She *comed* yesterday," without being aware of what is wrong, then it can be said that the learner has overgeneralized the use of a rule — the formation of the past tense with *-ed*. This is clearly not a random mistake, but an error in the sense discussed above. Such errors are, paradoxically, the clearest evidence that the students are indeed learning. When they apply some rule in an overgeneralized fashion, they are clearly involved in the processing of language data. It is such errors that can provide us with insights into how our students are processing data, and with information on what points of language must be emphasized in the classroom.

Errors can be described in terms of the "mechanism" metaphor. This seems to be a reasonable way to indicate that errors arise from the operation of specific learning strategies. The discussion here will be simplified.

The pattern of errors which characterizes the learners' developing competence is what distinguishes their speech from that of native speakers. It is fruitful to regard their speech as a "language." Several terms are currently used to refer to this language, but the one that seems to have gained the widest acceptance is *interlanguage*. This term draws attention to the fact that learner language is a separate code that can be located at some point *between* what the learners already know about language in terms of their L1 and what they are attempting to learn in terms of L2. It also implies that learners approximate the target language in successive stages.

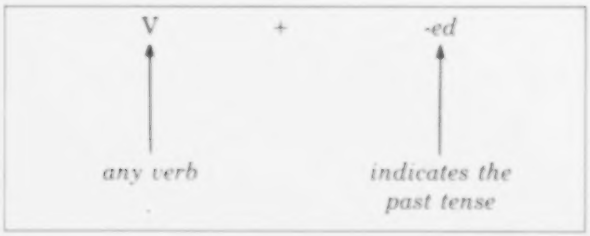
The interlanguage system contains two main types of error. These have been referred to in the literature as *interlinguistic* and *intralinguistic*.

Interlinguistic errors ("between (*inter*) languages") are produced by the automatic and unconscious transfer of the verbal habits of the native (or some other) language to the formulation of L2 forms and messages. In other words, the students *think* in terms of their own language as they formulate L2 utterances; and when the two do not coincide, interlinguistic errors emerge. The "mechanism" in this case is the unconscious stored knowledge of one's L1. The technique employed in applied linguistics which aims to detect and classify interlinguistic errors is known commonly as "*contrastive analysis*." It does not follow, however, that learning difficulties and interlinguistic errors

result from differences between L1 and L2. Rather, by knowing what the differences are, the teacher will be in a better position to understand those errors that do indeed occur as a result of interference from L1. Interlinguistic errors bear witness to the fact that students approach a second language on the basis of the linguistic information already available to them in the form of L1 competence. Often, reference to the differential feature which is causing the interference is enough to clear up the learning difficulty. However, in the case of children it is not always feasible, or possible, to make comparative statements. In this case, it is through the medium of some appropriately designed activity that the learner can be brought to understand intuitively the difference in question.

Intralinguistic errors ("within (*intra*) language") do not result from any previous linguistic knowledge but from the learner's attempts to construct a system for understanding and producing utterances in the target language, totally in terms of that language. A parallel can be drawn between intralinguistic errors and those errors that children produce typically in acquiring their L1 (developmental errors). In both cases, there are two main "mechanisms" involved: *overgeneralization* and *simplification*.

Overgeneralization (or *analogy*) is the tendency to apply a certain rule or pattern analogically in cases where it does not apply. Thus, for instance, when a child says "He *goed* away" for "He *went* away," it is obvious that the use of the past tense marker *-ed* has been overgeneralized. The rule present in the child's/learner's mind can be visualized as something like this:



Errors of this type show, incidentally, that the rule has been acquired, even if misapplied.

Simplification (or *pidginization*) is the tendency to reduce the complex forms of the target language to more manageable, or simplified, linguistic models. For example, a sentence such as "He no home" for "He's not home" can be seen to have reduced a complex linguistic form ("he's = he + is") to a more rudimentary one.

In many cases it is the interaction of both interlinguistic and intralinguistic mechanisms that will cause errors and difficulties in production. In fact, it is often impossible to diagnose an error pattern as due to L1 interference, or to some intralinguistic mechanism, or to both. For this reason some applied linguists prefer to classify errors in terms of broad categories such as *omis-*

sion, addition, selection, and *ordering.* More will be said about this shortly. (Figure 8 summarizes the error process.)

What implications can be derived from a study of such error-producing mechanisms? For one thing, it shows that the learner is not "at fault." The study of interlanguages has made it clear that errors are a "fact of life" in language learning. Consequently, the teacher should aim more for *successful* communication than for *perfection* in form and structure. The teacher should also realize that some errors can be generated by the language input of the teacher or by the course materials. The target language is often simplified by a teacher or by a course manual to reflect the stage at which learners find themselves. This is a common strategy used to facilitate the learning process. But it can also lead to errors. Hence errors can sometimes be traced to an instructional source.

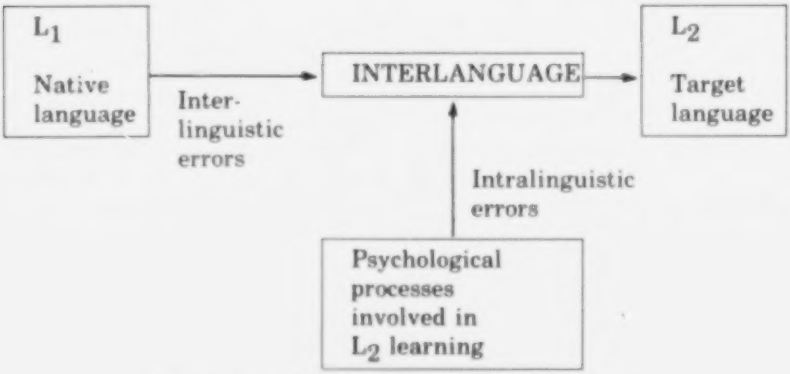


Figure 8 – The "Mechanisms" of Error

Source: Renzo Titone and Marcel Danesi, *Applied Psycholinguistics.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985, p. 94.

Perhaps the most important implication is that errors are always to be tolerated. They are, in fact, characteristic tokens of an active learning process. As S. Pit Corder has pointed out ("Error Analysis," in *Techniques in Applied Linguistics,* edited by J. P. B. Allen and S. Pit Corder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 131), errors characterize the sequence in which learning occurs. During the *presystematic* stage, learners are unaware of so many target language features that they make many random errors. Their errors become regular and easily recognizable during the *systematic* stage. During the *postsystematic* stage, they will continue to produce errors, but inconsistently so, and when asked to correct them, will be able to do so and also to give an account of the rule that has been violated. This suggests a pedagogical model of error which can help the teacher understand the learning process. Needless to say, during the various stages, it is crucial never to destroy the learner's self-confidence.

Recognizing the Differences Which Cause Errors

The error types which characterize the interlanguage of dialect-speaking children during the initial learning stages are due primarily to the formal linguistic differences that exist between the home dialect and the target language. By being able to "classify" the errors, the HL teacher will be in a better position to understand them and, thus, to prepare appropriate instructional strategies. But before discussing error classification, it might be useful to have some general guidelines for distinguishing between errors and mistakes. Essentially, the teacher should look for three things:

- A common and frequently recurring difficulty or deviation suggests that some error-producing mechanism is involved.
- The students' inability to correct themselves also suggests a possible error-producing source.
- Previous experience with a topic of language or discourse that makes the teacher anticipate difficulties with respect to that topic generally points to some error-producing mechanism.

In Figure 9 S. Pit Corder provides us with a useful "algorithm" for recognizing errors.

Once an error-producing mechanism is suspected, then it is useful to have some way of classifying it so as to be able to understand it better. As discussed above, since it is often impossible to trace an error to the responsible mechanism, it is more practical to itemize errors in terms of four general categories: *omission, addition, selection, ordering.*

Omission refers to something that is typically missing, for example, from a word, phrase, or sentence. *Addition* is the opposite tendency to add something to target language forms. *Selection* refers to the inability to select some item (for example, verbal tense or ending) correctly. *Ordering* refers to errors in the order of words, phrases, and so on. Any one of these error types can be produced by interlingual or intralingual mechanisms, or by the interaction of both kinds of mechanisms. In addition, an error can be seen to occur at some linguistic level: *phonological/orthographical, grammatical, lexical.* It is now possible to construct a chart for classifying interlanguage errors by putting these categories on two intersecting axes:

		Linguistic Level		
		Phonological/orthographical	*Grammatical*	*Lexical*
ERROR TYPE	Omission			
	Addition			
	Selection			
	Ordering			

Adapted from S. Pit Corder, *Introducing Applied Linguistics.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, p. 278.

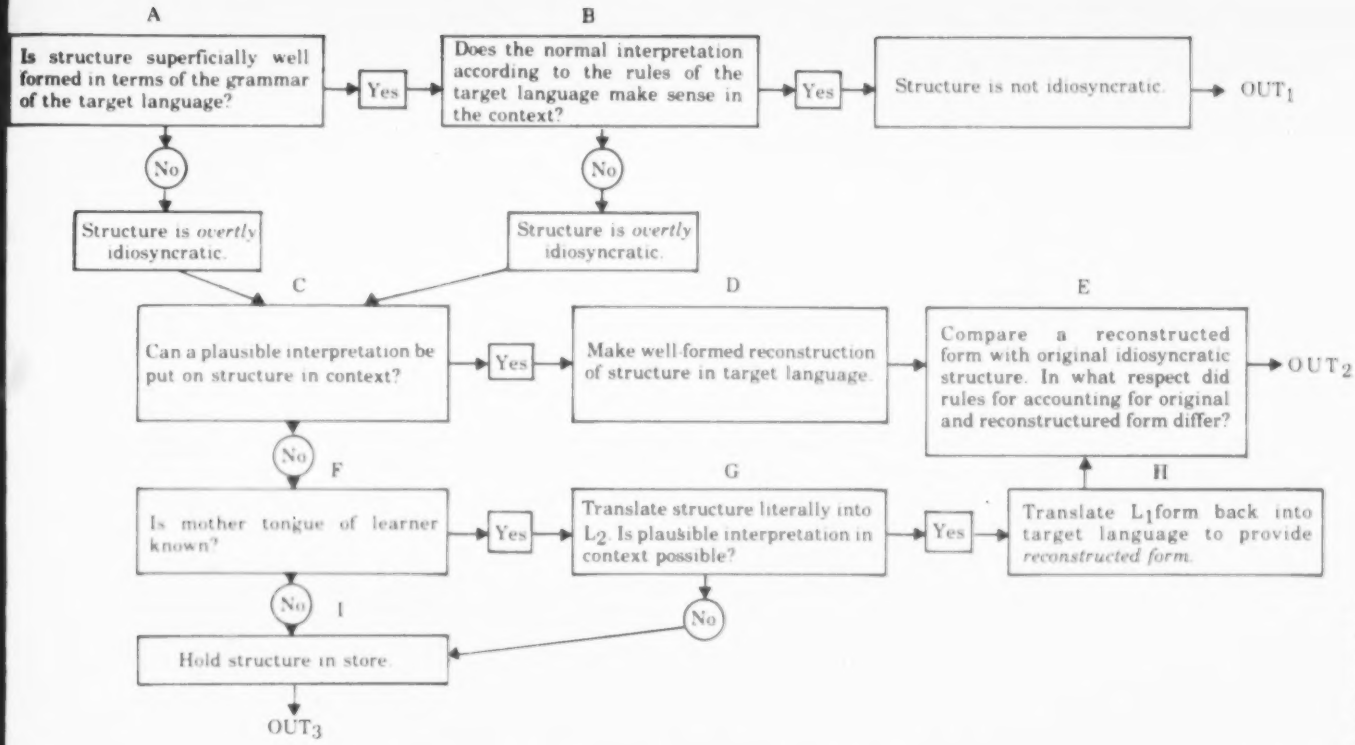

A
Is structure superficially well formed in terms of the grammar of the target language?
Yes
B
Does the normal interpretation according to the rules of the target language make sense in the context?
Yes
Structure is not idiosyncratic.
OUT1
No
Structure is overtly idiosyncratic.
No
Structure is overtly idiosyncratic.
C
Can a plausible interpretation be put on structure in context?
Yes
D
Make well-formed reconstruction of structure in target language.
E
Compare a reconstructed form with original idiosyncratic structure. In what respect did rules for accounting for original and reconstructured form differ?
OUT2
No
F
Is mother tongue of learner known?
Yes
G
Translate structure literally into L2. Is plausible interpretation in context possible?
Yes
H
Translate L1form back into target language to provide reconstructed form.
No
I
Hold structure in store.
No
OUT3

Figure 9 – An "Algorithm" for Recognizing Errors

Adapted from S. Pit Corder, *Introducing Applied Linguistics.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, p. 276.

If we add *discourse* errors (that is, errors in communicative appropriateness) on the vertical axis, and if we add a third intersecting axis which classifies an error as occurring during the *presystematic*, *systematic*, or *postsystematic* stage, then it is possible to construct a "three-dimensional" chart which classifies an error in terms of *type* (omission, etc.), *linguistic level* (phonological, etc.), and *learning stage* (presystematic, etc.). Such a chart has been suggested by H. Douglas Brown; and is reproduced here in adapted form:

		Linguistic Level											
		Orthography/ Phonology			*Lexicon*			*Grammar*			*Discourse*		
		1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
ERROR TYPE	Addition												
	Omission												
	Substitution												
	Re-ordering												

Legend: 1 — Presystematic; 2 — Systematic; 3 — Postsystematic

Adapted from H. Douglas Brown, *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980, p. 172.

Let's look briefly at one hypothetical example. Suppose that it is found that learners continually produce utterances such as the following ones without being able to understand what is wrong with them:

- English language is fun.
- Good student always studies hard.
- Girl eats some candy.

Since it is a recurring deviation and not recognized by the students, we suspect that we are faced with some error pattern that may be due to some error-producing mechanism. It is immediately obvious that the error is *grammatical* in nature. Moreover, since what is involved is a missing structure (the definite article), we can further analyse it as an error of *omission*. Specifically, the learner does not know that in English a singular subject must be preceded by an article.

It is now possible to put the peculiarities of dialect-speaking children into an appropriate psychological and pedagogical perspective. Clearly, the inter-language system of these children will contain the characteristics of the home

dialect, of the community language, and, possibly, of the L1 of the school (and of the dominant culture). The differential features that are bound to exist between a dialect and the target language, and which might produce characteristic interlanguage features, can be viewed in terms of linguistic levels. This is the approach taken here, since it seems to me to be the easiest one to follow. The four main levels of linguistic analysis, as discussed in the second chapter, are: phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical. To this typology, the level of discourse can also be added.

The phonological level is probably the one which immediately draws one's attention to the speaker's dialect background. In fact, dialectal speech is often equated with a difference in "accent," that is, with a difference in sound system between the dialect and the standard language. When it comes to phonological errors, it is important to make a distinction between what applied linguists call *global* and *local* errors. *Global* errors are important because they have a damaging effect upon meaning or communication; *local* errors, on the other hand, are of a minor nature since they do not cause any disruption of the meaning of a sentence. The following example will suffice to illustrate the difference.

In Italian, there are two general types of consonant sounds: single and double. To articulate double consonants it takes approximately twice the duration of corresponding single ones. Italian orthography also distinguishes between the two types of articulation by the use of single and double letters:

Single Consonants	*Double Consonants*
pe*n*a "pain"	pe*nn*a "pen"
ca*r*o "dear/expensive"	ca*rr*o "cart"
fa*t*o "fate"	fa*tt*o "fact"
pa*l*a "shovel"	pa*ll*a "ball"

These examples make it clear that it is important to keep these two articulations distinct, otherwise meaning will be affected. Any tendency to pronounce the double consonants as single ones can be seen to produce a global error, since it will damage the meaning of a sentence. This is, in fact, precisely the kind of error produced frequently by students of northern Italian backgrounds, because double consonants do not exist in their dialects. Thus, when a northern Italian dialect speaker says something like "La *pala* è nuova", is the speaker referring to a new "shovel" or to a new "ball"? Unquestionably, this constitutes a global error. On the other hand, a student who pronounces, say, the sound represented by *t* by putting the tongue against the lower front palate, rather than against the upper teeth (as in Standard Italian), produces only a local error that does not disrupt meaning. This is a common phonological characteristic of speakers of Sicilian and Calabrian dialects. To summarize, both types of error will indicate the region of origin of a speaker, but only global errors are important enough to require pedagogical attention.

Since orthography is inextricably bound up with phonology, many

phonological errors will surface as orthographical anomalies as well. Northern Italian students typically make spelling errors when it comes to words such as *"pala-palla,"* either by writing *"pala"* as *"palla"*, or vice versa.

For the HL teacher, it is especially important to keep in mind that pronunciation habits are the ones that are most naturally transferred from one language to another. And, in fact, in many dialects phonological differences may be the only ones that characterize the learner's interlanguage system. However, on the basis of my own research and experience, I should point out that most phonological errors in dialect interlanguages tend to be of the local variety. This means that phonological errors are not as important as other types, and thus do not require as much pedagogical attention. In the case of children – who are still in the process of developing their native sound system – the opportunity to imitate and to practice the heritage language in the classroom will, by itself, prove to be more pedagogically effective than any specific effort made by the teacher to instill "proper pronunciation habits."

At the morphological level, HL teachers will tend to find many dialect-induced errors. These can be classified in terms of two broad categories: *formation* and *inflection* errors.

Formation refers to the ways in which the words of a language are constructed. For example, in English nouns referring to a person who does something can be formed by adding the suffix *-er* to certain verbs like *wait, paint, teach*, and so on:

VERB ⟶	+ *-er* ⟶	NOUN
wait		wait*er*
paint		paint*er*
teach		teach*er*
etc.		

Adverbs (of manner) can be formed by adding the suffix *-ly* to some adjectives:

ADJECTIVE ⟶	+ *-ly* ⟶	ADVERB
clear		clear*ly*
plain		plain*ly*
tight		tight*ly*
etc.		

Inflection refers to the ways in which forms are altered in a systematic fashion according to some feature of structure. For instance, in English the indefinite

article has two forms: *a* and *an*. These are inflected forms which are used according to the initial sound of the following word: if it is a consonant, then *a* is used; if it is a vowel, then *an* is used instead:

a boy	*an egg*
a girl	*an apple*
a tree	*an island*
etc.	

The operation of this inflectional feature can be easily seen when an adjective beginning with a different sound than the noun is inserted between the article and the noun, triggering an appropriate inflectional change.

a girl ⟶ *an intelligent girl*
an apple ⟶ a *hard* apple

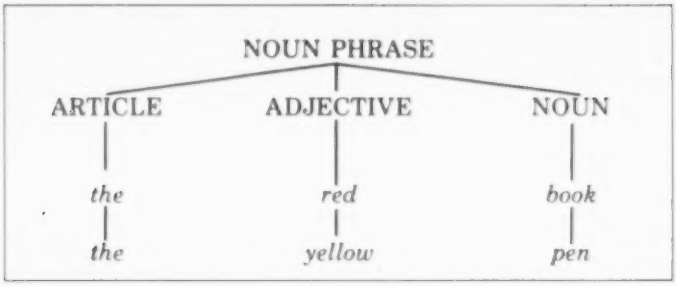
Inflectional regularities can be observed as well in such processes as changing nouns from singular to plural, conjugating verbs, and so on.

When it comes to dialect-speaking children, it is common to find that errors in morphological formation and inflection tend to be varied and plentiful. These can invariably be traced to morphological patterns in the dialect which differ, often only minimally, from the target language ones. Intralinguistic mechanisms such as analogy and simplification might also enter the picture to complicate the situation even further. The following examples are actual samples of classroom speech that I have collected in Toronto schools:

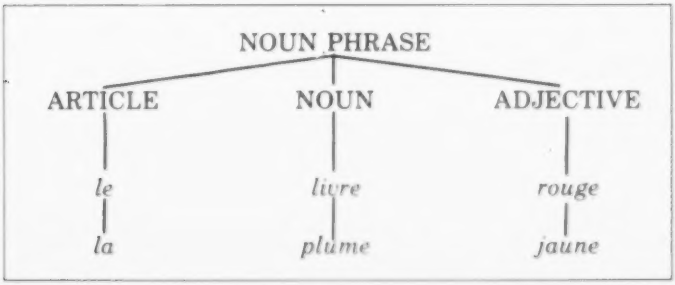
- Formation Error Type in Italian:
  - "*Ho andato* al negozio" (= *sono andato*)
  - "*Ho venuto* a casa" (= *sono venuto*)
- Inflection Error Type in Spanish:
  - "La pluma son roja" (= *Las plumas son rojas*)
  - "No tengo *la pluma*" (= *las plumas*)

In the Italian samples, the children show a southern Italian tendency to form all past compound tenses with the single auxiliary "*avere*" ("to have"). In the Spanish samples, it is easy to notice the tendency in many dialects not to pronounce final "*s*" which, clearly, has an effect on morphological inflection.

Errors in syntax can be viewed in terms of four main categories: *phrase structure, tense/mood selection, agreement,* and *transformation. Phrase structure* refers to the order in which the constituents of basic constructions are combined. For example, in English the phrase structure of a noun phrase consisting of an article, a noun, and an adjective is as follows:



In French, on the other hand, the order is generally the following one:



Although this is a useful category for error analysis in general, the HL teacher will rarely find dialect-related peculiarities in word order. This is because of the well-documented fact that word order tends to be invariable across the dialects of a language community.

Tense/Mood selection, as its name implies, refers to the choice of a tense and/or mood to express an action or set of actions. A common dialect-induced error in the Italian HL classroom is the wrong selection of mood in "conditional if-clause sentences." The tense/mood sequence in standard Italian is the following one:

	Imperfect Subjunctive	*Present Conditional*
Se	potessi,	verrei
"If"	"I could"	"I would come"

Many dialect speakers will typically choose tense and mood along dialect lines, as the following actual classroom samples show:

- The above sentence realized by a child of northern Italian background:

Se	potrei,	verrei
	Present Conditional	*Present Conditional*

- The above sentences realized by a child of southern Italian background:

Se	potessi,	venissi
	Imperfect Subjunctive	*Imperfect Subjunctive*

Agreement refers to the relations that exist among the constituents of phrases and sentences. For instance, in English a verb "agrees" with its subject when it is in the third person singular:

I	SING	WELL
YOU	SING	WELL
ETC.		
	but	
HE	SINGS	WELL
SHE	SINGS	WELL

Transformation refers to processes that bring about changes in phrase structure. There are four main kinds: *transposition, addition, deletion,* and *substitution:*

- *Transposition* is the process by which an item is "moved" in a phrase or sentence. For example, in English an active sentence is transformed into a passive one by changing the positions of the subject and object (among other things):

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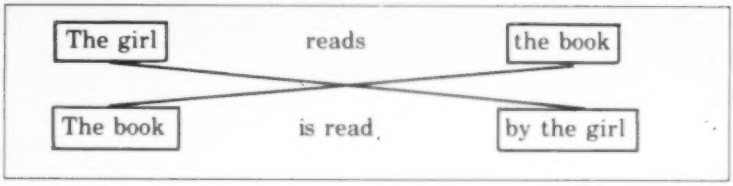


- *Addition* refers to the insertion of structures in constructions. For example, in French "*est-ce que*" can be added to form an interrogative sentence:

  Tu viens ⟶ *Est-ce que* tu viens?

- *Deletion*, or the elimination of some structure from a construction, can be seen, for example, in English when the preposition "*to*" is deleted in indirect object noun phrases which are transposed as follows:

  He wrote a letter *to* Mary ⟶ He wrote Mary a letter

- *Substitution* refers to the process of replacing one structure with another. For example, in Italian an object noun phrase is replaced by a corresponding object pronoun:

  Il bambino legge *il libro* "The boy is reading the book"

  Il bambino *lo* legge "The boy is reading it"

I have found very few transformation errors in HL children for two reasons. Once again, this area of syntax is fairly homogeneous across dialects; and, in any case, young children have not as yet "developed" this part of their syntactic competence fully. It might, however, become a problematic area in older children. The above transformational categories are given here simply for the sake of completeness of presentation.

Lexical errors can be traced not only to the home dialect, but also to the peculiarities of the community language. Thus, HL teachers might find both dialect words and loanwords in their children's interlanguage. The following classroom speech samples will illustrate this point:

- Italian Regional Words:
  - "Si, sono un bravo *frut* (*frut* = Friulian word for *bambino* "boy")
  - "Non andiamo mai *alloco*" (*alloco* = Ciociaro (dialect of the Lazio area, south of Rome) word for là "there")
- Spanish Loanwords:
  - "Mi padre tiene un *caro* nuevo" ("My father has a new *car*)
  - "Es en nuestra *yarda*" ("It's in our *yard*")

Discourse errors can also result from differences between the dialect and the target language in the ways in which forms or functions (greeting, requesting, inviting, and so on) are verbalized. For example, I have found some older Italian HL children using "*voi*" forms of address when speaking to the teacher ("*Come state voi?*" "How are you?"). This form of respect is more common in southern Italian dialects.

To summarize the discussion on the recognition of errors, it should by now be obvious that an analysis of interlanguage errors in terms of linguistic level will allow the teacher to "diagnose" an error occurrence with more precision. And this is a crucial first step in helping determine what kind of pedagogical action is appropriate. The categories discussed above are summarized in the chart found on page 40.

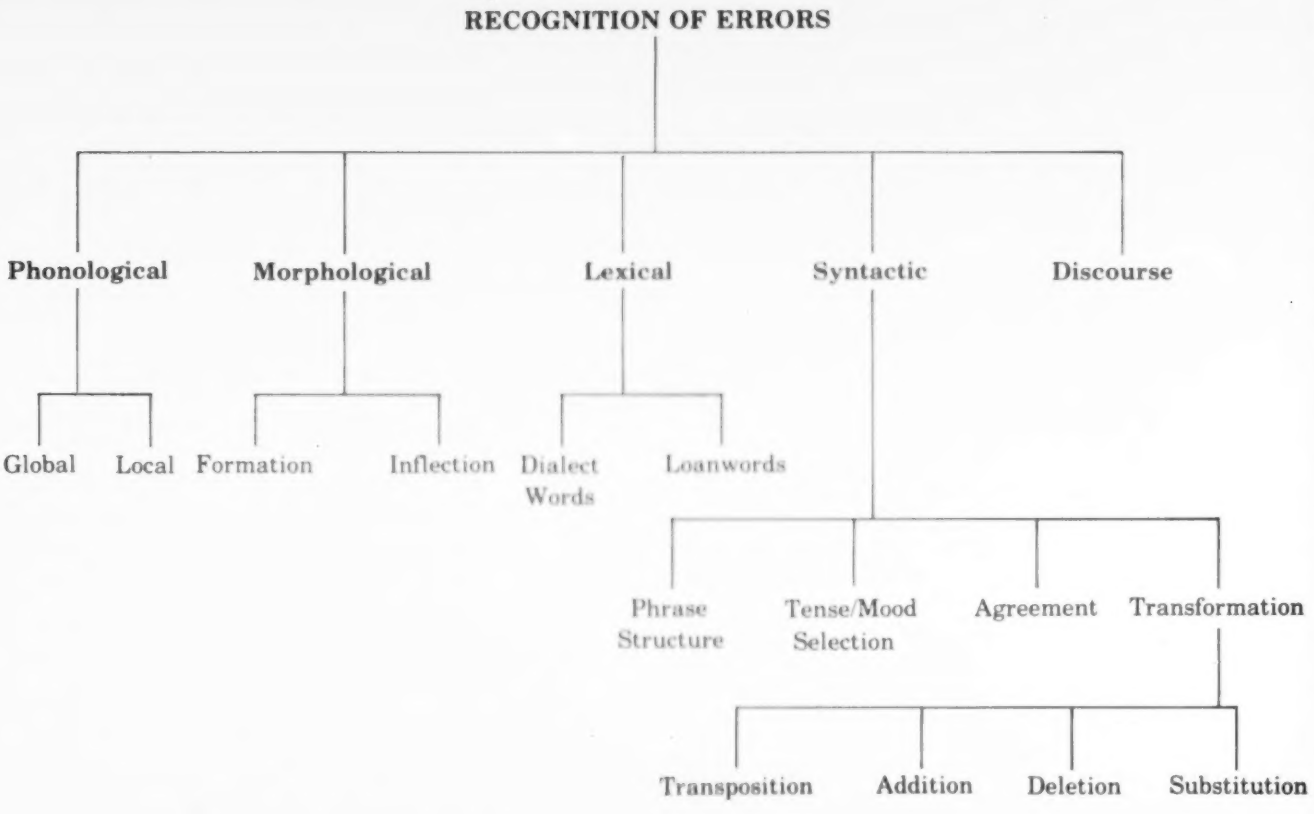
The Teacher as "Doctor"

The literature on error analysis has spawned a whole series of "medical" metaphors: one "diagnoses" errors, "detects the cause", and so on. In a way, this is an unfortunate terminological practice since it suggests that something is wrong which, as we have seen, is far from the truth. This kind of terminology logically suggests that the role of the teacher is that of "doctor." Once again, this might have negative connotations. However, this metaphor can be seen in a more positive light, if one perceives the teacher to be a "family physician" who is always there to help. Indeed, when it comes to dialect-speaking children, the teacher will need to know how to diagnose their speech differences on the basis of classroom "speech symptoms"; and it is this diagnostic ability that will help both the teacher and learner understand clearly what is going on.

But such linguistic theories will not give us the means to understand *why* learners commit errors. And they will not predict which errors will materialize. Often, totally unexpected ones will crop up. Learning difficulty is something very hard to define. It is, in all probability, connected to differences between languages. It is certainly not an inherent feature of a language itself — think of how "easy" it is to acquire one's native language. Essentially, error analysis allows us to zero in on an aspect of the target language that probably still needs to be learned, and therefore taught. The HL teacher as "doctor" will be able to get a clearer picture of what is causing specific learner problems by knowing how to detect and classify common errors.

The discussion in this chapter has some practical implications. These will be looked at briefly in the next chapter. Here, it is important to look at two questions which have more general pedagogical implications.

The first question is whether such classificatory schemas are really of any value. To answer this question, it is perhaps instructive to reflect briefly on the nature of knowledge. To make sense out of reality, the human mind appears to be "programmed," so to speak, to search out pattern. Once some


RECOGNITION OF ERRORS
Phonological
Morphological
Lexical
Syntactic
Discourse
Global
Local
Formation
Inflection
Dialect Words
Loanwords
Phrase Structure
Tense/Mood Selection
Agreement
Transformation
Transposition
Addition
Deletion
Substitution

pattern has been recognized, it can be more easily stored away and recalled by the memory system if a label is attached to it. The labels, which are normally verbal, are like pigeonholes into which things tied together by some feature can be placed. Through the accumulation of such labels, which define concepts and categories, knowledge is eventually built up. This simplified explanation might make it clear why error diagnosis is useful for HL teachers. It will allow them to build up their knowledge of how the mind of the dialect speaker functions as it attempts to process the target language data. The categories, or labels, that are associated with an error pattern will allow the teacher to understand that pattern more precisely and then to plan appropriate pedagogical action.

The second question is whether the HL teacher should be familiar with all the dialects of the language in order to be able to classify errors. The answer to this question is clearly in the negative. The errors can be easily seen to be of a certain type (phonological, morphological, and so on), whether or not the specific dialectal source of the error is known. The identification of an error in inflection, for example, will allow the teacher to focus on an area of morphology. After all, dialectologists rarely speak any of the dialects they investigate. They are however, trained to recognize linguistic differences in ways similar to the ones discussed in this chapter.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Marina K. Burt and Carol Kiparsky, *The Gooficon: A Repair Manual for English*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House, 1972.

This is a good introduction to the types of errors commonly found in student interlanguages. The point of view is somewhat different from the one I have taken, but the end result is the same.

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S. Pit Corder, *Introducing Applied Linguistics*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973.

This contains an excellent chapter on error analysis.

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Robert J. Di Pietro, *Language Structures in Contrast*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House, 1976.

This constitutes a detailed discussion of errors. It provides a bridge between theory and practice.

5

Practical Considerations

Knowing what a dialect is and how to classify dialect-related peculiarities allows the HL teacher to "take a step back" and get a synoptic view of the fundamental theoretical issues involved in teaching dialect-speaking children the target language. Without this theoretical perspective, the teacher will eventually be confronted with some problem that cannot be resolved in an adequate way on an "intuitive" basis alone. Teachers can be compared to engineers. The latter apply the theoretical knowledge they have acquired to the planning and drawing up of designs from which a practical activity is to be accomplished (for example, building bridges). Needless to say, a bridge is only as good as the plan from which it came. So too with language teaching: the kinds of insights to be gained from error analysis will go a long way towards helping the teacher design appropriate instructional activities so that more solid linguistic bridges can be built. Let's now look at some of these practical activities.

Pronunciation and Grammar

In the area of pronunciation, the teacher must first of all separate global errors from local ones, for it is these errors which cause communicative misunderstanding. This is really not a difficult task. For instance, to use the Italian example discussed in the previous chapter, it can be easily determined that the distinction between single and double consonants is semantically crucial in Italian. Setting up "minimal pairs" such as the following will make this obvious:

Single Consonants	*Double Consonants*
beve "he/she drinks"	bevve "he/she drank"
coro "chorus"	corro "I run"
fumo "smoke"	fummo "we were"

But this distinction – known technically as an "*opposition*"–is not cross-dialectal. Speakers of northern Italian background do not distinguish between single and double consonants, and thus will have to be *taught* to perceive and produce them. An error in this area is plainly of the global variety.

After the teacher has identified and itemized recurring global errors, the next step in instructional practice is a normal one: to make the dialect-speaking students aware of the difference and to give them some opportunity to practice it. The following are some suggestions that I have found to be particularly useful:

- Examples containing minimal pairs (for example, *pala* vs. *palla*) can be prepared in advance and used in the form of some normal classroom routine (imitation practice, oral reading, etc.) to illustrate a difference between the student's dialectal phonological system and that of the standard language.
- A useful technique with children is to impart a feature of language by involving them in some associated physical activity. To use the Italian opposition described above as a hypothetical example, the teacher can put, say, a toy "*pala*" on one classroom desk and a "*palla*" on another, and then ask individual children to "pick up" the "*pala*" or "*palla*" as the case may be. By involving children physically in language-related tasks, psychologists have noticed that learning tends to be more successful.
- The use of questions to which children can relate, and which are constructed on the basis of the crucial phonological difference, is also quite effective:
  - "Maria, hai una *penna*?" "Mary, do you have a pen?"
  - "Giovanni, dov'è la *palla*?" "John, where is the ball?"

Many more specific techniques can be employed in this area. The point to be made here is that, whatever instructional method or technique a teacher might use, the dialect speaker's phonological traits which underlie a global error pattern must not be ignored. On the other hand, errors of the local variety require little, if any, direct pedagogical attention. Normal exposure to the standard language in the classroom setting, together with daily practice routines, will suffice.

In the area of grammar, it is useful, as discussed in the previous chapter, to distinguish between morphological and syntactic error patterns: the former can be further subdivided into formation and inflectional errors, and the latter into phrase structure, tense/mood selection, agreement, and transformational errors. Once again, the crucial first step is to identify and itemize persistent errors in these areas. The typology suggested in the previous chapter is intended to facilitate this important discovery task. Then, the teacher can zero in on the problem areas simply by making space for them in the regular methodology employed to teach grammatical matters.

A few techniques that I have found of practical value can perhaps be men-

tioned here. The question which most seems to plague teachers of language to children is whether or not to include some formal grammatical training in a course, and if so, *what* grammatical topics to teach and, more importantly, *how* to teach them.

Some educators believe that "grammar" has no place at all in the beginning stages, primarily because it is very hard, if not impossible, to convey grammatical information simply and intelligibly to children. Other educators, however, claim that some form of early grammatical instruction is not only possible but desirable from a psycholinguistic standpoint. Psychological experiments like the one by L. R. Gleitman, H. Gleitman, and E. F. Shipley ("The Emergence of the Child as a Grammarian," *Cognition*, 1 (1972), pp. 137-64) have shown quite convincingly that children as young as five years of age are capable of making rather sophisticated judgments about the grammatical patterns in a language. So, it would seem that the question should not be whether to teach grammar in HL courses, but rather *how* to teach it.

A few general criteria are worth discussing here:

- Grammatical training should be as "inductive" as possible, and always related to language use. It should be accurate, intelligible, and exemplify relevant features. Thus, if the error in question is one of word formation, the teacher should focus on conveying to the learners the exact nature of the problem.

- Grammatical explanations and exercises should always be synchronized to the learner's cognitive capacities and stored knowledge about the functioning of language.

- Formal rules will tend to be useless unless they are "translated" into a language that children can understand. This language, from my own experience, tends to be "visual" in nature.

These points suggest some practical instructional techniques. I will use Italian to illustrate them, since this is the HL with which I am most familiar.

Visually based grammar imparts the same information as "terminological" explanations, but in a more simple and direct way. Graphic devices such as boxes and arrows superimposed on carefully selected model words, phrases, or sentences not only convey most of the information contained in terminological explanations, but also avoid the unnecessary confusion that such explanations might create (if they are understood at all in the first place). Children seem to have no problems whatsoever understanding them.

Simple geometrical figures (boxes, triangles, circles), for instance, can be used to highlight some problematic area of morphology. Suppose the teacher discovers an error pattern in the inflection of the present indicative of first conjugation verbs. To help the students "visualize" this feature of morphological structures, boxes superimposed on the appropriate suffixes can be used as follows:

PARL [O]	"I speak"
PARL [I]	"You speak"
PARL [A]	"He/She speaks"
etc.	

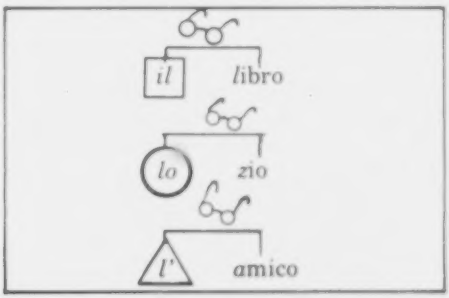
Circles can be used to alternate with boxes to highlight, for instance, the use of *ch* and *gh* with first conjugation verbs – an area that always seems to generate errors:

TU CER	(CH)	I	"You are searching"
TU PA	(GH)	I	"You are paying"
etc.			

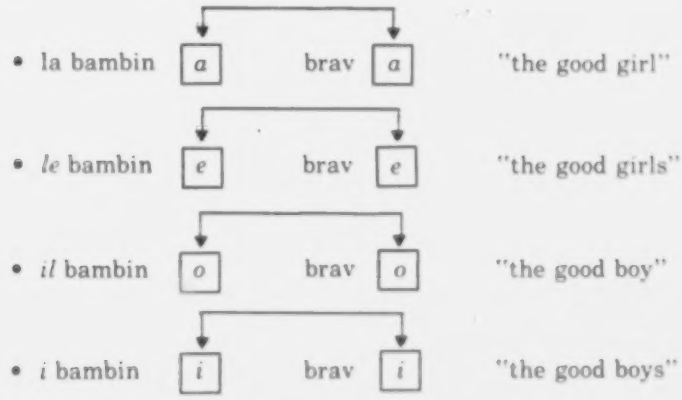
The use of three figures (box, circle, triangle) simultaneously might sometimes be necessary. For example, dialect speakers always seem to have problems in learning how to inflect the definite article in Italian because of interlinguistic differences. The three masculine singular forms, in particular, cause many learning difficulties:

[il]	*l*ibro "the book"	[il]	*q*uaderno "the notebook"
(lo)	zio "the uncle"	(lo)	*z*aino "the knapsack"
<l'>	*a*mico "the friend"	<l'>	*u*omo "the man"

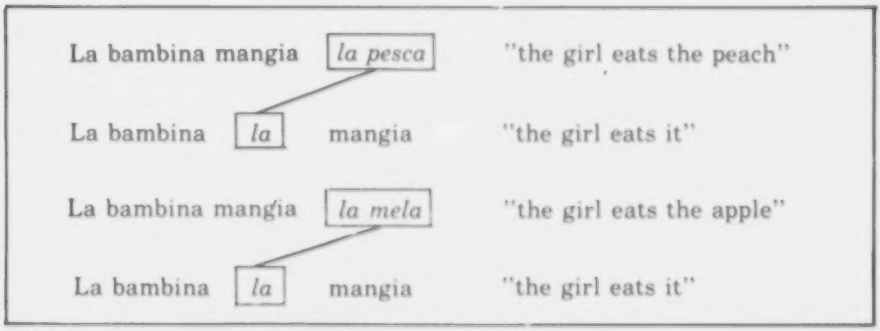
With practice, the student will come to associate, through visualization, each figure with its corresponding inflected form: *il* occurs before consonants, except *z* (and *s* + consonant), and *l'* occurs before vowels. This can be imparted inductively by a pictorial device, such as a pair of glasses, which is intended to direct the learner's attention to the crucial feature:



Boxes and arrows can also be used for syntactic purposes. For instance, problems in agreement between adjectives and nouns, which always emerge in the dialect speaker's interlanguage, can be addressed by using pictorial representations such as the following:



Patterns in transposition and substitution – for example, the replacement of object noun phrases with pronouns – can be represented in the following manner:


La bambina mangia la pesca "the girl eats the peach"
La bambina la mangia "the girl eats it"
La bambina mangia la mela "the girl eats the apple"
La bambina la mangia "the girl eats it"

The point should be obvious by now. Visual grammar can be used for specific instructional purposes. Graphic devices constitute a system of pictorial aids which children can easily understand and relate intuitively to grammatical matters. These devices will help the teacher zero in on a specific error pattern in morphology or syntax in terms of its type (formation, inflection, and so on).

There is one last point to be made here. Grammatical training *per se* is meaningless. It should always be linked to some communicative task, or related to classroom activities. In other words, grammatical instruction should

always be followed up by having the children apply it in some way. The application can take the form of a game, a manual task, or a song in which the whole class is involved. Visual techniques such as the ones described here constitute only a first step in the process of teaching a child to understand the workings of language. It should always be kept in mind that the application of this knowledge in communicative contexts is a crucial component of the learning process. Teachers should always make sure that their students have an opportunity to use what they have learned.

Needless to say, any pedagogical material prepared by the HL teacher should zero in on a specific error pattern in order to give the students the opportunity to concentrate their efforts in a particular area. Once this has been taken into account, then it would seem to me that the use of materials designed in a recreational fashion and requiring direct pupil involvement is certainly to be preferred in HL courses. Such material always seems to stimulate interest in the subject matter through a "sense of achievement." I will now suggest a few such activities.

Fill-ins, mazes, and word searches can be used for phonological matters. Fill-ins can take on the form of letter insertions in words, sentences, or crossword configurations. For example, if the learning goal is the distinction between the use of *c* and *ch* in Italian (*c* is used before *a*, *o*, *u*, and consonants, and *ch* before *e* and *i*, to represent the "*k*" sound), the student can be given simple words, sentences, or crossword arrangements such as the following ones:

- Put *c* or *ch* in the following words:

> ____ ane "dog" (= cane)
> ____ itarra "guitar" (=*ch*itarra)
> ____ 'uore "heart" (= cuore)
> ____ iuso "closed" (= *ch*iuso)
> etc.

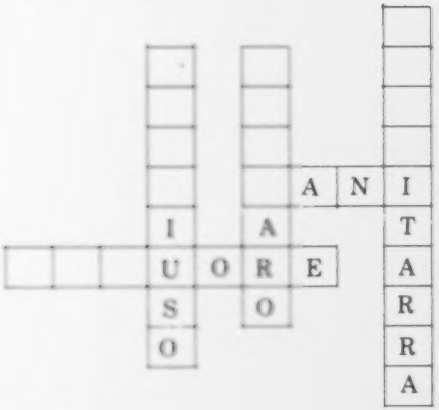
Each word should be accompanied by a visual illustration of its meaning.

- Put *c* or *ch* in the blank spaces:

> Il _____ane mangia l'osso "The dog easts the bone"
>
> Gianni suona la _____itarra "John plays the guitar"
>
> etc.

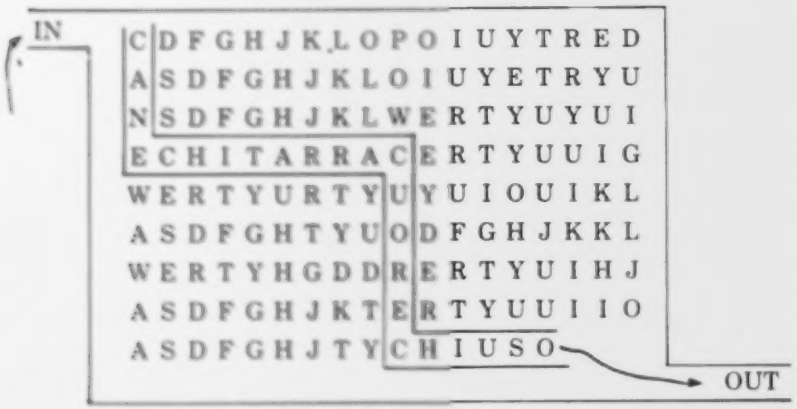
Once again, visual illustrations should be used.

- Put *c*'s or *ch*'s in the crossword puzzle:

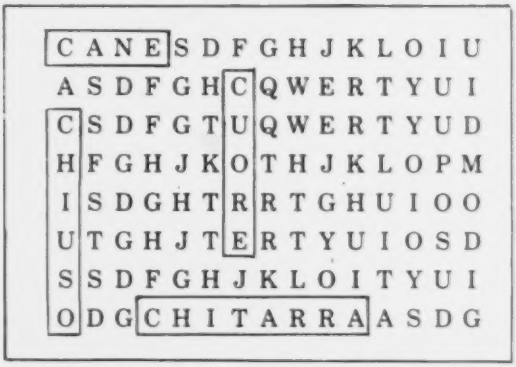


Mazes are useful for teaching orthographic recognition (word spelling, word shape, etc.):

- Find a way out of the maze by locating the words: *cane, chitarra, cuore, chiuso:*


IN
C D F G H J K L O P O I U Y T R E D
A S D F G H J K L O I U Y E T R Y U
N S D F G H J K L W E R T Y U Y U I
E C H I T A R R A C E R T Y U U I G
W E R T Y U R T Y U Y U I O U I K L
A S D F G H T Y U O D F G H J K K L
W E R T Y H G D D R E R T Y U I H J
A S D F G H J K T E R T Y U U I I O
A S D F G H J T Y C H I U S O
OUT

Word searches serve the same purpose:


C A N E S D F G H J K L O I U
A S D F G H C Q W E R T Y U I
C S D F G T U Q W E R T Y U D
H F G H J K O T H J K L O P M
I S D G H T R R T G H U I O O
U T G H J T E R T Y U I O S D
S S D F G H J K L O I T Y U I
O D G C H I T A R R A A S D G

Words broken up into syllables and then scrambled are also helpful:

NE/CA = cane
RA/TAR/CHI = chitarra
RE/CUO = cuore
SO/CHIU = chiuso

Fill-ins are also useful for zeroing in on morphological and syntactic problems:

- Put an *i* or an *e* in the following words (= syntactic agreement focus):

la bambina brava — le bambine brav_____

il bambino bravo — i bambini brav_____

etc.

Scrambled sentences are also very useful in the area of syntax. To make this activity more communicative, the scrambled sentence can be made to be a response to a certain question:

- Che tempo fa oggi? "How's the weather today?"
  BEL TEMPO/FA/OGGI (= *Oggi fa bel tempo* "Today is a nice day")
- Dove va Maria? "Where is Mary going?"
  VA/MARIA/A SCUOLA (= *Maria va a scuola*)

etc.

The point should be obvious by now. Any puzzle can be constructed with a specific error pattern in mind. The teacher must, of course, remember to set the degree of difficulty of the puzzle in line with the child's intellectual capacities and age.

Vocabulary

When it comes to vocabulary, it will be recalled that the interlanguage of dialect speakers contains dialectal words and loanwords. Obviously, teachers will immediately recognize these words, and thus should have no difficulty in itemizing them. Once this has been done, it would seem, once again, that children learn best through the use of visual techniques. Photos, slides, drawings, and so on, to which a word or sentence meaning can be associated should be used whenever possible. Physical activity tasks, such as the ones described above, are also effective in imparting meaning. For example, to teach the names of the objects and things in a classroom, the teacher can ask individual students to do such things as "Go to the *door/window*," "Pick up the *chalk*," and so on, in the target language.

Vocabulary topics should be connected with childhood experience; for example, words referring to family members, parts of the body, and so on. Emphasis should be put on concrete vocabulary in the early childhood years. The children can be asked, for instance, to bring photos of their family to class and then to describe them orally. Other techniques, such as the use of songs, nursery rhymes, and riddles, can all provide meaningful learning contexts. It seems to be a pedagogical maxim that the more a child is involved — physically and mentally — in the educational process, the more positive the results.

When preparing vocabulary materials on a specific error type, it would appear that the use of visual aids of all types is indeed the most effective technique. Without going into specifics, the following general guidelines in developing vocabulary materials may be of some use:

- The visual stimuli that the teacher prepares for the purpose of eliciting vocabulary should form a lexical category; for example, family members, parts of the body, days of the week, and so on. Most of the lexical errors found in interlanguage systems tend to fall into such categories.
- In the case of loanwords, the teacher could prepare a simple "translation" activity:

How would you say the following in Italy?

Question	*Answer*	
storo?	negozio	"store"
trocco?	camion	"truck"
fenza?	recinto	"fence"
etc.		

- The use of "incorrect" forms has often been condemned on the doubtful grounds that the student might learn them. It should, however, be clear from the discussion in the previous chapter that this is most unlikely. Language learning is not "parrot learning." In the above example the student is simply involved in a translation task, and nothing more. This is a very useful exercise, in this case, because it is in the direction of exploiting the incorrect forms produced by the learner in a controlled fashion.

- Recreational activities are, once again, particularly effective in getting the student interested and involved in the learning process. For instance, the teacher can easily prepare an "odd-one-out" game to elicit vocabulary items. An example might be the following. The student is given a picture of four objects — a pencil, a pen, a ruler, and a car. The student then picks out the item that does not belong to the set (the car), and writes its name in the target language. Another common visual puzzle is "pick out the differences." The student is given two picture scenes which contain a specific number of differences. The student picks them out and writes down their names in the target language.

- The reading of children's stories in the target language, with accompanying content questions, is also a good technique for eliciting vocabulary. The teacher can also write up some brief story focussing on a lexical category that has been found to produce lexical errors.

Communication

The identification and itemization of discourse-related errors is not a difficult task. Basically, they surface in the form of words and expressions that are culturally "out of synch." For instance, dialect-speaking Italian students often say "*buon pomeriggio*" (literally "good afternoon") during the afternoon hours. Such students are obviously not aware of the fact that in Italy the way for saying "hello" in the afternoon hours is identical to the way for saying "good evening," namely *"buona sera."* To recognize such communicative anomalies, teachers can ask themselves the following two questions:

- Why is this word/expression not quite accurate?
- How is the function in question (greeting, inviting, expressing doubt, expressing anger, and so on) expressed in the standard language?

Once the communicative anomalies have been identified, the teacher can impart the correct item as any item of vocabulary. Moreover, by using such techniques as dialogues, role-playing, games (for example, "charades" or "Simon Says"), the students can be involved directly in communicative tasks. Each activity can be tailored with a specific error pattern in mind. The use of visual aids (like films and slides) can complement productive communication. A few other techniques include talking about oneself, describing another

student, keeping a diary, and acting in skits. The literature on such techniques is vast and need not be described here. A few bibliographical references are given at the end of this chapter.

There is no need to develop "materials" as such for communicative purposes. The techniques alluded to above, and those described in the literature on communicative language teaching, are the "materials" for stimulating discourse in the classroom.

Communication, however, should always be the final component of any formal training procedure. The teaching of grammar and vocabulary should always be accompanied by some practical communicative task that will give the child the opportunity to apply the newly acquired knowledge in some meaningful way. Moreover, topics of a cultural nature should constitute the nucleus of communication. Students should know what the people of their heritage talk about, what they value most, how they organize their social structures (family, home, etc.), what their myths and legends are, what pastimes they prefer, what their favorite sports are, and so on. Many of these topics will, of course, be determined by the textual materials of a course. However, the teacher can assign "cultural projects" in line with the calendar (for example, Christmas plays, Easter traditions, and Muslim festivals). Also, the teacher can compare the heritage culture to the majority culture. Differences and similarities in popular music, in dress code, and other areas always generate much interest.

Concluding Remarks

One final word. The suggestions made in this book on teaching dialect-speaking children represent only a fraction of the techniques available to the teacher. However, it was not my intention to give an encyclopedic treatment of error analysis; rather my goal has been to show the HL teacher that a pedagogical response that is appropriate for dialect speakers is not only possible, but desirable. Once a typology of error patterns has been set up, the teacher can zero in on those features that the child needs to concentrate on, and then insert them into the routines of the classroom. By facing the child's interlanguage in a direct way, rather than ignoring it, the teacher will eventually establish a relationship of trust with the learners. And this is the primary condition for any learning to occur.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Marcel Danesi, "Pedagogical Graphics in Second-Language Teaching," *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 40 (1983), 73-81.

Marcel Danesi, *A Guide to Puzzles and Games in Second Language Pedagogy*. Toronto: OISE Press, 1985.

These two works go into more detail on the use of graphics and puzzles in the classroom.

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Anthony Mollica, "Visual Puzzles in the Second Language Classroom," *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 37 (1981), 583-622.

A good discussion on how to use visual puzzles with many detailed suggestions on their communicative uses.

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Janice Yalden, *Communicative Language Teaching: Principles and Practice.* Toronto: OISE Press, 1981.

This gives many good methodological suggestions for stimulating classroom discourse.

Other publications in the Language and Literacy Series:

Jim Cummins, *Bilingualism and Minority-Language Children*

Janice Yalden, *Communicative Language Teaching: Principles and Practice*

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64